

President's Report Economic Society of Australia Western Australian Branch
Activities since 1 July 2016

It is a pleasure to present my third annual report.

Branch Activities

Following the national retreat for women in economics just prior to the 2016 *Australian Conference of Economists* in Adelaide, Analena Gilhome approached the state branch of the Society to enquire about establishing a Women in Economics Network (WEN) in WA. She was invited to address the WA Council of the Society on Wednesday 26 October 2016, which resulted in Analena being drafted onto the WA Council and chairing a subcommittee with a brief to develop recommendations on how the WEN could be introduced to WA. Analena will be talking about the WEN in an addressing under agenda item 5; and I do not propose to steel her thunder here. But I would like to acknowledge that the background work by the subcommittee members culminated in the successful launch of the WEN in WA on 23 March 2017, at the offices of *Deloitte Access Economics*.

But there have of course, been many other highlights since July 2016.

Bruce Layman, the Chief Economist at the *Economic Regulation Authority*, presented an seminar on "Market Power Mitigation in the Wholesale Electricity Market", at the University Club, UWA, on Wednesday 5 October. Bruce's discussion covered the division of Western Australia's *Wholesale Electricity Market* into separate capacity and energy markets; and he reflected on regulatory arrangement in such a context. That event was well received and well attended.

Anusha Mahendran organised the *Young Economists Network's* traditional – and very successful – Quiz Night at the UWA Tavern on Thursday 3 November. Good food, Pizza!, a few drinks and lots of economic (and other) questions from Quiz Master and DJ Stephen Klomp. I was unable to attend, due to a clash with a meeting of the Central Council, but a number of people (including my wife Mary) told me it was a good event.

For a change of pace, the Society's end-of-year Christmas event was a picnic sundowner on the shores of Matilda bay, which was held on Thursday 1 December from

5:00pm to 7:00pm. Turnout was modest, it must be said, but every one enjoyed the event.

Just prior to the 2017 State Election, the Society's arranged for John Nicolaou, the WA Executive Director of ACIL Allen and formerly Chief Economist at the WA Chamber of Commerce, to present a seminar on "The State of WA Government Finances: Implications for the Future". The seminar was held at the University Club, UWA, on Wednesday 1 March. John provided a lively overview of the state of the WA economy and discussed the implication of the subdued economic activity for the incoming government, in the context of growing state debt.

Activities since the Society's last AGM reached a high point with the workshop on *The WA Economy in International Context*, convened at Curtin's Graduate School of Business in Murray Street in Perth on 25 July 2017. *Dr Mike Nahan*, the current leader of the opposition in WA and the former Treasurer of WA, presented the keynote address. He spoke on a range of topics, including the character of the WA economy and economic issues for the Government to be cognisant of given that character. It was an excellent presentation, given with great candour and drawing on mix of fine factual detail and big picture narrative, that reflected on the recent history of migration, wages policy and the challenges of governing a resource based economy. That was followed by a joint WEN-YEN session, with *Emily Poole*, of the RBA, providing an update of economic conditions and monetary policy; and *Dr Yixiao Zhou*, from Curtin University, presenting a very scholarly paper on the impact of automation on inequality as the demands for skilled labour rise and the demands for low skilled labour diminish. After lunch at Miss Maud, *Alan Langford*, the Chief Economist at Bank West, spoke about the 'next big thing' in WA in the post boom years, arguing that it won't be one thing, *per se*, but a range of smaller but nevertheless significant things, such as increased mining activity that produces inputs for the energy storage industry. *David Christmas*, the WA Treasury's Director of Economic and Revenue Forecasting, presented a paper that warmed the hearts of historians. He looked at the very long term history of the WA economy; and he also compared it to other regions of countries that have similarities to WA, including Chile. This very successful day ended with a speech by *Rick Newnham*, Chief Economist at the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, on the WA public finances. He talked about the current WA Government facing a structural imbalance that would cause the State's already alarming net debt to increase further unless remedial action is take; and he reflected on the disincentive effects of the horizontal fiscal equalisation arrangements used to distribute the GST between states.

The WA Branch of the Society also a significant sponsor of the PhD Conference, convened at the University of Western Australia.

The Outlook: Activities for 2017-18

Professor Tim Besley of the LSE has accepted the invitation to present the Shann memorial lecture later this calendar year.

Both the WA Treasury and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry have also expressed interest in partnering with the Society by hosting seminars for members in their premises.

Branch Membership

Total membership in July 2017 is 95 (an increase of 17 from the 78 in July 2016); of whom 32 are also members of the WEN WA.

Website upgrade

Members may have noticed that the WA Branch's website has been much improved. We have added historical records, such as past WA Councils, past Austin Holmes award winners; and photos and biographies of members who supplied that information. I would like to thank Margaret Nowak and Harry Bloch, for sifting through the Society's historical records to identify information that should be uploaded to the website; and Anusha Mahendran and Jill Trinh for their excellent work on the website upgrade project.

The Australian Conference of Economists

Australian Conference of Economists (ACE), organised by the NSW and was held at the Sofitel Hotel in Sydney in July 2017. The Central Council supported two YEN members to attend the conference, which Anusha will mention under Item 6.

ACE 2018 will be held in Canberra.

Prize Winners - 2016 Academic Year

The winners of the prizes awarded by the Economic Society of Australia (WA Branch) for the completed 2016 academic year are:

Kate Salomon	<i>Best First Year Student in Economics</i> at Edith Cowan University (\$500)
Marcella Kandiah	<i>Best First Year Student in Economics</i> at the University of Notre Dame Australia, Fremantle (\$500)
Beth McMullan	<i>Best First Year Student in Economics</i> at Murdoch University (\$250)
Brooke Loneragan	<i>Best Graduating Student in the Bachelor of Commerce with Honours in Economics</i> at the University of Western Australia (\$500)
Shannon Hadley	Joint winner: <i>Best Student in Introductory Economics and Macroeconomic Principles</i> at Curtin University (\$125); and
Danielle Leotta	Joint winner: <i>Best Student in Introductory Economics and Macroeconomic Principles</i> at Curtin University (\$125)
Kristina Primus	<i>Best Graduating Student in the Bachelor of Commerce with Honours in Economics</i> (\$250) at Curtin University; and <i>Best Honours Thesis in Economics</i> examined in Western Australia (\$500)

I am delighted that we will be joined at the dinner this evening by Kate, Marcella, Beth, Brook, Shannon and Kristina to be presented with their prizes. We will post the prize to Danielle in the coming days.

Administration of the WA Branch of the Economic Society

It has been a big year for economics in WA.

I would like to thank my fellow Council members for volunteering their time and skills over the last year. Special thanks go to Vice President Peter Kolf, who has done a wonderful job over the past few years. Many thanks also to our Treasurer Christopher

Shulha, Secretary Jasmine Kaur, Young Economists WA Coordinator, Anusha Mahendran and Branch Administrator Jill Trinh.

Anusha has also done a marvellous job running the Young Economists Facebook page.

It has also been a big year women in economics in WA, which is due to the administrative efforts of a number of people. So I would like to thank and congratulate Analena Gilhome, the Economic Society's women in economics subcommittee, which comprised Margaret Giles, Erin Stone, Anusha Mahendran, Maria Mangano; and the WA WEN Committee that emerged from that sub-committee with the addition of Rabecca White.

And the WA Council of the Society has always given good council to the state branch. Splendid work everyone.

Council Members 2016/17

Executive

Michael McLure (President), University of Western Australia
Peter Kolf (Vice President),
Chris Shulha (Treasurer), Doney Leahy Private Assets
Jasmine Kaur (Secretary), Murdoch University PhD Candidate

Members

Harry Bloch
Philip Brown
David Butler
James Campbell-Sloan
Ishita Chatterjee (resigned, 4 March 2015)
Michael Dockery
Margaret Giles
Analena Gilhome (Chair, WEN)
Inga Kristoffersen
Anusha Mahendran (Convenor, YEN)
Maria Mangano
Greg Moore
Rahul Salim
Abu Siddique
Erin Stone
Malcolm Tull

Michael McLure
16 August 2017