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President's Report
2020/21 Annual General Meeting

14 July 2021

Good evening everyone

Welcome to the Economic Society of Australia's WA Branch's 2020/21 AGM and Annual Dinner.

For members of the Branch, it is great to see all of you in person for the first time in over 12 months. It's very pleasing to have such a turnout.

I would especially like to welcome five of our 2020 academic year prize winners and guests, who I will formally introduce later in this presentation. Those in attendance are Sebastian Tofts-Len, Michael Cohen, Nina Van Beem, Austen Peters and Gavin Muir. Not able to attend are Kezia Pratita Sentosa and Conor Jenkins.

Can I start by acknowledging the traditional custodians of the land on which we hold this meeting – the Whadjuk Noongar people. We pay our respect to their elders past, present and emerging and recognise their continuing connection to Country.

I took over from Erin Stone at the beginning of this year, when Erin shifted to Adelaide to live. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Erin for her great contribution to the Branch and to Central Council, first as a Committee member, then as President. Our loss is South Australia's gain.

On a more sombre note, I was saddened to learn of the passing of Erin's dad, Chris Stone, earlier this year. He was a member of the Committee and was actively involved in the early planning for the Conference.

The focus of attention this year has been ACE 2021. The theme of the Conference was Wealth and Wellbeing and it celebrated the century of Cecil Arthur Pigou's seminal work – The Economics of Welfare, published in 1920.

I was co-convenor of the Conference along with Ishita Chatterjee.

Well – we made it! Much of my address tonight is about thanking the people who helped make the Conference a success.

The Conference was a long time in the making. It is more than two years since the initial planning for the conference commenced – and then Covid intervened and the in-person 2020 conference was postponed and transformed into the virtual conference of 2021.

Going fully virtual simplified planning a little. We didn't have to worry about venues, flights and accommodation for keynote speakers and so on. However, presenting a three-day

conference via Zoom presented its own challenges and increased my anxiety levels – especially around the things that could potentially go wrong. My early experience with Zoom was patchy. Things did go wrong. However, we were certainly helped by the experience of delivering the Australian Gender Economics Workshop.

In my view, the Conference has been a great success. We managed to attract around 278 participants, almost 100 registrations over our target, with around 124 papers delivered. The four key note speakers – Gigi Foster, Paul Fritjers, Olivier Bargain and Francine Blau delivered exceptional presentations. I would like to especially thank Michael McLure, Silvia Salazar, and Astghik Mavisakalyan, who were instrumental in bringing the Keynote Speakers to the Conference.

At this point we look to have made a modest profit of around $20,000 – which, under the circumstances, was a very pleasing result.

I would like to thank all the people who assisted in delivering the conference, including my c0-convenor, Ishita Chatterjee, the Organising Committee, the Program Committee (superbly chaired by Ken Clements, with support from Michael McLure, Silvia Salazar and Yixiao, Zhou), Arinex (our conference organiser – in particular Li Mei Giam, Ben Wilhelm and Natasha Soraggi), Di Litherland (Central Office) – our Zoom Master, and the numerous people who chaired the various sessions. I should also mention Peter Kolf and Erin Stone, who were heavily involved in the early planning of the Conference.

We were supported by a number of sponsors. Many had originally agreed to sponsor ACE 2020. When it was cancelled they did not hesitate to roll their sponsorship over to ACE 2021. This was particularly generous as a Zoom conference limits their exposure.

I would like to mention them here:

Gold Sponsors
- Australian Bureau of Statistics
- Department of Finance
- Reserve Bank of Australia
- University of Melbourne – Department of Economics

Silver Sponsors
- Department of Education, Skills and Employment
- Department of Social Services
- Western Australian Treasury Corporation

I would also like to acknowledge the support of Smart Data Analysis Systems Group (SDAS).

I would like to thank those people who have contributed to the WA Branch over the year, including our Office Bearers and Committee, the WEN and YEN Committees, and our administrators Sue DeBrett and Manuela Torgler, who have worked tirelessly to support all aspects of the WA Branch. Sadly, Sue passed away earlier this year.

Young economists represent the future of the Society. To acknowledge this the Branch makes several awards to the top students in economics at the four universities. This year the winners are:

<u>Notre Dame</u>
Best first year Economics student: Nina Van Beem ($250)
Best Graduating student in the Economics major: Michael Cohen ($250)

<u>Murdoch University</u>
Best first year student in Economics: Kezia Pratita Sentosa ($500)

Curtin University
Best student in Economics 100: Gavin Muir ($150)
Best student in Macroeconomics: Sebastian Tofts-Len ($150)
Best Honours in Economics student: Austen Peters ($300)

University of WA
Best Honours student in Economics: Conor Jenkins ($500)

I look forward to presenting the awards during tonight's dinner. I would encourage you to join the Society and become actively involved in Branch and National activities. Also, please encourage your mates to join.

What is next for the WA Branch? Over the past year, a number of Committee have been involved in planning the Conference. This has soaked up quite a bit of time, especially as we are all busy. Now that the Conference is over, Covid allowing, I'm keen to restart our normal Branch activities such as Policy in the Pub and the Economic Forum. I would also like to expand our membership.

Finally, I would like to recognise two people.

First, Michael, who is leaving the WA Branch Committee after nearly 20 years of service, including as President for several years. Well done Michael!

Second, Kristina Primus, who provided considerable assistance in preparing for the AGM and Annual Dinner. Thank you Kristina.

In conclusion, thank you once again to everyone who gave up their time and expertise to the Society this year.

Please enjoy the dinner.

John Roberts, President
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