



# ASBESTOS DISEASE SUPPORT SOCIETY

## 2020 Board Report to Members

My name is Phil Blair and I am the Chair of the Asbestos Disease Support Society. Thank you all for attending the 2020 Annual General Meeting.

I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet and pay my respect to elders, past, present and emerging.

### **Passing of Members**

Before I begin to deliver the 2020 Board Report, I think it is appropriate we acknowledge, remember and pay our respects to all those who have passed away as a result of asbestos and silica related disease and those who are suffering as a result of their exposure.

We must remember that all they did was turn up to work to earn a living to support their families or just went about their daily lives – nothing more, nothing less. We are still seeing the affects today with 50 members of the Society passing in 2020 – which, unfortunately is on par with numbers in 2019. If we could all just take a moment's silence, please.

### **Board Report**

I would like to acknowledge the Board of Directors here with me – if you could put your hands up as I call your name please:

- Bianca Neve, who is also the Deputy Chair
- Pat Cini
- Margot Hoyte
- Peter Close
- Garry Rogers; and
- Sheila Hunter

Two (2) directors were not able to attend today– Andrew and Trish Ramsay. Andrew Ramsay deserves a special mention. He is unable to be here with us today as he is currently on the “grey nomad” trail. Andrew was awarded life membership in November 2019 for his services to the Society and his dedication to supporting sufferers and raising awareness of the dangers of exposure to asbestos.

I would also like to acknowledge Trevor Torrens, the Society’s General Manager and ADSS staff - Kerrie Williams – Office Manager, Kay Ravbar – Accounts Officer and Judith Thompson – Social Worker and Karen Selmon – Clinical Support Nurse.

The Society was founded over 28 years ago by Shirley White OAM to support sufferers of asbestos related disease, their families and carers.

Over this period the Society’s mission has grown to not only provide support to sufferers, but also to:

- Promote awareness of the risks associated with asbestos and silica exposure;
- Lobby all levels of Government for improvements on asbestos and silica related issues;
- Work with health professionals and the broader health community to aid in a better understanding of asbestos and silica related disease; and
- Register exposure for workers and the general community.

## **COVID Interruption**

I’m sure we can all agree that 2020 has been a “different” year. The emergence of COVID has affected and changed the world we live in. Disruption to the Society’s activities has also occurred with all community morning teas cancelled from March and yet to resume. Additionally, our major annual fund raiser, the Charity Race Day was also cancelled along with the annual symposium, Labour Day BBQ and a number of other events. However, rest assured, we have continued to provide support to sufferers. Let’s hope we can return to normality in 2021.

## **Services**

The services provided by the Society continues to play an important role in the life journey of many of our members. It is worth noting these services -

- Access to our Social Worker to assist members to understand their entitlements and support access to appropriate medical, health and other support services – which is a core role of the Society.
- Medical equipment on loan - for example portable oxygen concentrators.
- Occupational therapy assessment

- Nutrition and dietary consultation and information
- Telephone support from our volunteers
- Community morning teas
- Peer to peer support through our member groups
- Up to date information through the quarterly newsletter
- Legal Assistance through Turner Freeman Lawyers, who are outstanding in their commitment, compassion and outcomes for the Society's members.

A new support service has also been introduced with the engagement of Karen Selmon, as the Society's Clinical Support Nurse. We also welcomed Judith Thomson, a qualified social worker to establish our silicosis services and also support our members with asbestos related disease.

Natalie Barber, who many of you came to know well, left us to broaden her experience in the social work environment. We wish Natalie all the best and thank her for her support of our members.

## **Finances**

Despite the COVID disruption to our major fund raiser, the charity race day, the Society is in a sound financial position. In 2020, the Society produced a surplus of **\$239,190.00**. As at 30 June 2020, the Society had a net asset base of over **\$2.2 million dollars**.

The significant surplus produced was certainly not contemplated when the Board approved the budget. But as I stated earlier, it has been a different year with COVID issues prominent. **Trevor will speak regarding the financials in more detail shortly.**

In terms of financial stewardship of the Society, it is important to note that the audit confirmed:

- An unqualified audit opinion.
- There were no material uncertainties or going concern issues.
- No instances were found of non-compliance with laws and regulations that may have a material effect on the financial statements.
- There was no awareness of any fraud or illegal acts during the audit.

It takes a lot of support to provide the services just mentioned. On behalf of the Society I would like to thank the construction industry for their ongoing support. In particular, recognition and thanks must go to the CFMEU and other unions

such as the ETU and National Union of Workers for their efforts to support this important cause.

I would also like to thank our corporate sponsors for their ongoing support and for the many donations from individuals that we regularly receive.

## **Silicosis**

Following the changes to the Society's Constitution at the 2018 AGM, we continue to build our support arrangements for those who have been diagnosed with other "dust" related lung disease - in particular silicosis – an occupational lung disease with symptoms similar to asbestosis. This support is provided under the banner of "Silicosis Support Network".

The Network operates on the successful and long-standing principles and services provided to those suffering from asbestos related disease. The Network aims to create a community where we all work together to offer support to sufferers of Silicosis including their partners, loved ones and families. This support includes:

- Individual and Group Support
- Information and Resources
- Services and Referrals

The Network has also, just recently, launched Australia's first and only website providing information, resources and available support mechanisms for sufferers of silicosis. I would especially like to thank Daniel Lewis and Adam Emery, who have been diagnosed with silicosis, for their assistance and support as the Network's Silicosis Mentors.

The Network is also a member of Lung Foundation's expert working group which is developing a range of resources on occupational lung disease.

## **Strategic Planning**

As I mentioned earlier, a mission of the Society is to lobby all levels of Government for improvements on asbestos related issues. There are still a number of "bad laws" that seem to ignore the World Health Organisation's advice that there is no safe level of exposure that can protect a person from developing an asbestos related disease – particularly mesothelioma.

In 2021, we will continue to lobby for improvements, including:

- The establishment of a Queensland based asbestos eradication agency
- The abolition of DIY homeowner removal of asbestos containing materials
- The classification of asbestos containing low density board from non-friable to friable.
- A Statewide Strategic Plan for the Safe Management of Asbestos which reflects priorities for awareness, management and removal of asbestos from the built environment, which will ultimately lead to the elimination of asbestos related disease.

While the Society enjoys a strong relationship with the Queensland Government, some responses to these issues has been disappointing.

In relation to silica related issues, the Society continues to engage with both the Queensland Government and the Federal Government's National Dust Diseases Taskforce. In particular we are pushing for:

- A total ban on products that contain high levels of silica
- Better Support for sufferers and their families
- Development of a National Code of Practice
- An enhanced Workplace Exposure Standard
- Compulsory and free health screening
- Establishment of a National Dust-Related Disease Register
- Licensing of business in high risk sectors
- Stronger and more committed enforcement measures; and
- Establishment of a Dust Disease Research Fund

## **Governance**

The Society is governed by a Board of nine (9) directors elected by financial members. A Director's term of appointment is two (2) years with compulsory retirement of half the sitting Directors each year. A retired Director is eligible for re-election.

In accordance with the Society's Constitution, nominations were called for five (5) Director positions in September. At the close of nominations, seven (7) applications had been received. As a result, for the first time, the Society was required to hold a ballot of members to elect the five (5) directors. I am pleased to announce, the following members have been elected to the Board.

- Pat Cini
- Sheila Hunter
- Andrew Ramsay
- Trish Ramsay; and
- Garry Rogers

All are returning directors.

Congratulations to the elected directors and thank you also to Leo Jenson and Nancy Notman for their nominations.

Thady Blundell of Turner Freeman Lawyers will provide an overview of the election process later in the agenda.

## **Membership**

As of today's date we have 664 members of the Society which is down on the 711 reported at the 2019 AGM. The old saying that "there is strength in numbers" is very true. Rightly or wrongly, numbers count when communicating the Society's message - whether it be to Government or other organisations. A strong support base provides the Society with a strong voice. I would like to thank our renewing members for their ongoing commitment to ADSS and I would ask you to promote the Society's message and encourage people who would like to support the Society by becoming a member.

## **Corporate Membership**

Corporate members of the Society are companies and industry organisations that show support for the Society's mission and values. We currently have 32 Corporate members, slightly up on the 2019 figure of 29. All corporate members are recognised in the quarterly newsletter and at selected functions and events and we thank them for their support.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, I would particularly like to thank all the staff, our volunteers and the Board of Directors for all of their hard work. As I stated earlier, the Society is in a good financial position, we have strong governance arrangements, a terrific management team and excellent support services for our members, their families and carers. We look forward to continuing our work over the next 12 months.

The Board report will be posted to the Society's website in the coming days.