

## ANI President's Report to the 2025 AGM

Ladies and Gentlemen

Thank you for attending the 2025 Annual General Meeting. Your support is greatly appreciated.

Our Treasurer, Kate Miller, is currently overseas and can't be with us, but I will shortly present her financial report and as you will see the financial position of the ANI remains solid. The last year was particularly good for the Institute, with members being invited to participate in a wider range of events and comment on key maritime and naval developments, so as the country becomes more interested in naval and maritime affairs, it seems the reach and value of the ANI is being appreciated more.

This year, the highlights have been:

Our two Traditional Events

- We held another very successful Vernon Parker Oration and dinner in May. We again filled the room at the Hotel Realm for the VPO, so I thank all those who attended for your support.
  - We were fortunate to have the first navy Admiral to be the Chief of Defence Force in over 20 years ago - Admiral David Johnston AC RAN - deliver our Vernon Parker oration. Admiral Johnston provided a very comprehensive perspective of how he sees Australia's security challenges and what the ADF is doing in response. Judging by the number of requests we received for copies of his speech, it was very well received beyond just those in attendance.
  - We also awarded the McNeil Prize for defence industry to Dr Robert Dane, the founder and CEO of Ocious Technologies who make the Blue Bottle Uncrewed Surface Vessel.
- Our 2025 Goldrick seminar, held earlier this month, was also very successful in its new format. We explored the theme: "Action Stations: Australia's fighting navy in 2030". We selected this theme as there is much discussion around the future navy – nuclear submarines, Hunter Class Frigates and a doubling of the surface combatant force – but the navy of 2030 won't be all that different to that of today, and we wanted to explore how we can optimise that fighting force in the short term.
  - We had a fantastic scene-setting presentation the Director General of National Intelligence, Andrew Shearer, followed immediately by the Chief of

Joint Operations, VADM Justin Jones. This intel followed by ops sequence – familiar to all involved in military planning – set the scene very well.

- We were honoured to have two service Chiefs – Vice Admiral Hammond and LTGEN Simon Stuart - provide their perspectives as well as some historical perspectives, industry panels looking at autonomy and a range of other thought provoking sessions.
- Give this is the ANI's 50<sup>th</sup> year, we also took a punt and moved the venue to the Hotel Realm which proved successful. The venue was very professional and while the move from ADFA meant less opportunity for MIDN to drop in, I was pleased to see quite a few MIDN and officer cadets – from all three services - register and attend the full day. My thanks to the COMD and CO of ADFA for allowing them to attend.
- As a special event to commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Institute we also held a reception in the middle of the year where our patron, CN, spoke. The reception was designed to reflect on where the ANI came from and to recall all that has been achieved in 50 years. While we seek to be forward-looking, it is always good to stop and remember your history and what impact you have had, as an organisation.
  - And while talking history, I'd also like to thank Peter Jones who has been key in resurrecting earlier articles and works published by the ANI for inclusion in our journal and newsletter over the year. That has been a great way to recall key events in our navy's past and what was topical within the ANI at the time.
  - And of course, the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary ANI commemorative Gin which was released a few months back. I believe it sold out pretty quickly, so hang on to your bottles – they may be worth dragging out at the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary!
- The Commodore Sam Bateman Book Prize continues to advance the profile of naval writing in Australia. The 2024 winner was Tom Lewis for his excellent book, the Sinking of HMAS Sydney which covers much more than that single action. It provides a great appreciation of what life was like in the navy in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in a format that is easy to read and appeals to the general public.
  - Judging is underway for the 2025 award and again we have a great selection of books in the mix.
- The *Saltwater Strategist* podcast series has continued to flourish. Jen Parker, who did a great job establishing the podcast, passed the leadership to Duncan McRae who has continued the excellent quality.

- The *Australian Naval Review* also continues to grow in stature, now publishing two editions a year in a regular drumbeat, with more articles than we can publish – a nice place to be. Sam Fairall-Lee continues as editor role, so thanks to him and his advisory panel.
- Our themed dinners have also proven to be valuable events for our industry partners, academia, the attaché corps, and senior defence leaders. We had two this year, including one themed around the emerging maritime role for the Army which will only grow in the years ahead.
- I'd also like to highlight the ongoing success of the ANI website and weekly newsletter and acknowledge the work of Richard Hart and Crispin Hull, who compiles the newsletter and articles, is most praiseworthy. Some figures are:
  - Over the past year, the ANI website has posted 878 articles – up 100 over last year, and the usual e-newsletter each week has summaries and links to all the new articles published in the previous week.
  - After a review of our newsletter distribution list, we now stand at just under 1000 subscribers who ask for our free weekly newsletter and my thanks to Crispin Hull who runs that service, plus all those who source topical articles for Crispin to include each week – most notably Peter Jones, Desmond Woods, Tim Coyle and Ricardo Koss.
  - The newsletter generates, on average, 3600 hits a week, again up about 600 hits per week from last year.
  - The website is now a substantial repository of maritime and naval works and is proving very valuable for researchers. With over 6800 articles – 4 million words – it is vital to our mission of promoting debate and discussion on maritime and naval affairs.
  - 85% of our website hits are from Australia, with just over 10% from the US, UK, Canada and New Zealand, and the remaining 5% from the rest of the world, with readers from India increasing.
- Membership continues to grow. This time last year I reported 377 members, and today we stand at 398. We aim for 500, and our membership team is developing some targeted strategies to increase numbers, especially amongst more junior officers and sailors.
- It is also great to see the wider community drawing on the ANI to participate in maritime-related events. The ANI has partnered with the Naval Studies Group at UNSW to release the recent maritime strategy at the Indo-Pacific conference earlier this month, and we also co-sponsored an autonomy workshop with the Australian Association for Uncrewed Systems, also at IndoPac.

- We have continued exploiting social media's power to provide a forum for maritime matters. As you know, the platforms attract different demographic groups, and we have councillors who are active in the major ones. Of note, some of our younger Council members – Matt Lee and Sabrina Ting - have developed a new Instagram profile as a way to try and reach the younger members of the Navy.
- Our corporate sponsors continue to grow. In the last financial year, we welcomed Omni Executive and Synergy Group as new sponsors – with the complete list now:
  - Platinum – BAE Systems Australia, (ASC Shipbuilding), Luerssen Australia
  - Gold – Kongsberg Defence Australia, Navantia Australia, Omni Executive (NEW),
  - Silver – Adroitia, CEA Technologies, CAE Australia, Quinetic Australia, Saab Australia, Synergy Group, Thales, Systematic
  - Bronze – Boeing Defence Limited, Serco Defence (DMS Australia)

Can I take this opportunity to thank all our sponsors again for your ongoing support of the ANI. We simply could not do the things we do without our sponsors, so thank you one and all.

## **Council**

I would like to thank all the members of the ANI Council for their contribution to the ANI's output. Each AGM is an opportunity to renew the Council and for the first time in a long while we have more nominations than we have positions, so we will shortly go to a vote.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the work of Sue Hart and Richard Hart at Commerce Management Services in ensuring the crucial administration and organisation of events is undertaken in a most professional way. The workload we placed on Sue and Richard continues to increase as we do more and they never fail to step up.