



**REPORT OF OUTGOING PRESIDENT, ANGELA BOWNE SC
TO THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF SYDNEY PEN
HELD AT 6.00 PM ON 24 MAY 2007**

On behalf of the Management Committee of Sydney PEN, I thank you all for being here this evening and also for your support of Sydney PEN and your attendance at our events during the past 12 months.

It has been a strenuous and exacting but exciting year for the Management Committee.

Sydney PEN Writers Panel

Immediately after taking office, the Management Committee appointed the Sydney PEN Writers Panel, ten of Australia's very top writers who support and are involved in the work of Sydney PEN: Geraldine Brooks, John Coetzee, Tim Flannery, Helen Garner, Kate Grenville, Tom Keneally AO, David Malouf AO, Frank Moorhouse AM, John Tranter and David Williams AO.

This panel serves as an important identification of leading writers with Sydney PEN and its work, and there have been a number of requests for them to represent Sydney PEN at festivals and elsewhere.

Six of the panel were signatories to a Sydney PEN letter in October 2006 calling on the Federal Government to implement the changes recommended by the Australian Law Reform Commission to the anti-terror legislation passed in 2005.

Kate Grenville, Frank Moorhouse and David Malouf took part in the Customs House Readings in the past year, and Tom Keneally will be taking part in the next few months.

David Malouf participated in the Sydney PEN session at Perth Writers Week and will also be representing Sydney PEN at the 2007 Byron Bay Writers Festival and at the 2007 Brisbane writers festival. Frank Moorhouse gave a strong talk in October last year for Sydney PEN at our event, *Writers in the Time of Terror*, at the Sydney Mechanics School of Arts. Frank also represented Sydney PEN at an important public symposium held by the University in Western Sydney on the Sedition Laws in March 2007. David Williamson spoke on PEN at a Sydney PEN members night.

Four of the Writers Panel are participating in our wonderful new 3 Writers Project (see below). Tom Keneally, David Malouf and David Williamson will introduce three of the events that form part of the project in 2007, and JM Coetzee will write the introduction to the book of essays that forms another part of this project.

Young Writers Committee

Another important development which has assisted in identifying Sydney PEN with another sector of the writing community was the appointment of a Young Writers Committee. It seemed to Sydney PEN that the institution of such a committee would assist in attracting younger people to PEN and help ensure a vibrant future for the organisation.

Five emerging writers, all under 25, were appointed in 2006: Jeff Errington, who chairs the committee, Nick Landreth who is the secretary, Bonny Symons-Brown, Hugo Bowne-Anderson and Richard Renshaw. A further appointment will be made shortly, Bonny Cassidy. The Young Writers Committee has assisted the work of the Management Committee in many ways, from transporting and installing the Sydney PEN banner at Customs House readings and Sydney PEN events, helping to organise events, emceeing events, writing articles for the Quarterly Magazine and contributing articles to the Sydney Blog.

Jeff and Hugo attended the International PEN Conference in Hong Kong in February 2007, presenting papers and emceeing the closing event. The Young Writers Committee generated a great deal of interest at the conference from both International PEN and other PEN centres who want to use the committee as a model. As a result, they were invited by International PEN to make a presentation at the 2007 International Congress in July in Senegal in relation to the formation, work and perceived future of young writers within International PEN. Hugo will be attending the Congress to deliver a paper to the Assembly on Youth, Learning and Literature and participate in a workshop following the Assembly. This is the first time that International PEN has specifically addressed youth issues and the impetus has come directly from Sydney PEN. We are hoping that Sydney PEN will have the opportunity at Senegal to put forward a resolution that International PEN forms a new sub-committee at international level of young writers.

One of the aims of the Young Writers Committee is to assist young writers and, to that end, they have applied for a grant from the Australia Council for an exciting project: to start an online journal for writers under 30 which will reflect the work of PEN generally by including translations by young writers (a much neglected area), essays on sedition, censorship and other issues relevant to PEN's aims, as well as short fiction, poetry and multi media work. The online journal will serve as a forum of ideas for writers under 30.

Those attending the Sydney Writers Festival will notice that there is an empty chair at every session, representing writers unable to be present because they have been imprisoned, killed or otherwise prevented from attending for reasons associated with their writing. The information on writers for each of those 250 sessions was prepared by the Young Writers Committee.

The young writers team substantially organised Sydney PEN's performance poets' event at the Sky Phoenix Lounge in December 2006, *From Slam to Beijing and Back*, featuring slam poets Miles Merrill and "Citizen" Tom Keily and Chinese underground poet, Bei Ling. They are currently organising a number of events, including a panel in September at the *2007 Newcastle Young Writers Festival*, Australia's premier event for emerging writers, publishers and artists.

On behalf of the management committee, I thank the members of the Young Writers Committee for all they have done and their support and for their continuing enthusiasm for PEN's work.

Sydney PEN Blog

The Sydney PEN Blog is another innovation, and the first created by a PEN Centre. This project is in partnership with the University of Technology, Sydney, a very strong supporter of Sydney PEN, which offers the blog to two students in each semester as part of the subject Online Journalism 1 in its BA in Communication. Bonny Symons-Brown, a member of the Young Writers Committee, was one of the two inaugural student bloggers and now edits the blog. Articles are posted on the blog by members of the Young Writers Committee and the two students currently enrolled in the course. These articles have raised important issues such as the sedition laws, censorship, and the future of Australian literature.

Censorship and Sedition

In July 2006, Sydney PEN wrote to the Commonwealth Attorney-General, the Hon Philip Ruddock, expressing concern about proposals to amend censorship legislation and to alter the current system for classifying books. Sydney PEN also wrote to the Hon Bob Debus, NSW Attorney-General expressing those concerns. The genesis of these proposals were six of the so-called 'Books of Hate'.

A group of eight Islamic books (the 'Books of Hate') had been referred to the Classification Review Board by the Attorney-General after the body which classifies books, the Classification Board, had determined that each of the eight books should be classified as unrestricted. The eight books were also cleared by the Australian Federal Police and the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions. The Classification Review Board decided that two of the books (*Defence of the Muslim Lands* and *Join the Caravan*) should be restricted but that the remaining six should be classified as "Unrestricted". Sydney PEN's concerns about the proposed amendments to the censorship legislation included the fact that Attorney-General wanted to strengthen the laws in order to ban books which had been cleared after considerable scrutiny by various authorities.

On 7 August 2006, the NSW Council for Civil Liberties commenced legal action in the Federal Court for judicial review of the Classification Review Board's decisions to ban *Defence of the Muslim Lands* and *Join the Caravan*. The matter is still before the Court. Sydney PEN has devoted part of its website to full details of this issue and the court proceedings.

On 3 May 2007, the Attorney-General's Department released its *Material that Advocates Terrorist Acts Discussion Paper* on proposed laws for banning Australian publication of such material. In May 2007, Dr Ben Saul, the chair of Sydney PEN's Freedom to Write Committee, made submissions on behalf of Sydney PEN in relation to the proposed legislation.

In relation to the sedition laws, Sydney PEN made submissions in July 2006 to the Australian Law Reform Commission in relation to its inquiry into the sedition legislation which Sydney PEN and others had opposed in 2005. Sydney PEN responded to the ALRC's subsequent report, *Fighting Words: A Review of Sedition Laws in Australia*, by supporting the considerable changes to the sedition legislation which the ALRC recommended, and wrote to the Attorney-General, Mr Ruddock, in that regard.

In October 2006, after it became apparent that the Federal Government would not adopt the ALRC's recommendations, Sydney PEN, supported by JM Coetzee, Tom Keneally AO, David Williamson AO, Frank Moorhouse AM, John Tranter, Geraldine

Brooks, Nicholas Jose, Katherine Thomson and other members, called for the Federal Government to implement the changes recommended by the Australian Law Reform Commission.

Also in October 2006, Sydney PEN held an important event dealing with issues of sedition and censorship, a talk by Frank Moorhouse on *Freedom of Expression in a Time of Terror*, at the Sydney Mechanics School of Arts. In March 2007, Frank represented Sydney PEN at a symposium held by University of Western Sydney, where he spoke on the sedition laws with ALRC president David Weisbrot and sedition law expert Associate Professor Michael Head, UWS Law School.

Writers' Festivals

During the past year, Sydney PEN has been strongly represented at Writers Festivals. David Malouf participated in a Sydney PEN session at Perth Writers Week. Sydney PEN sponsored a panel, *Writing About Trauma*, at the Byron Bay Writers Festival featuring Jean Bedford, James Bradley, Mark Ragg and Janette Turner Hospital, and it will also sponsor an important session on *Freely Speaking*, with David Marr and David Leser at the 2007 Byron Bay Writers Festival in July.

We sponsored a session at the Newcastle Young Writers Festival in September 2006, together with a writing innovation master class led by Ivor Indyk and others and work is in progress for a session at the 2007 festival in September.

We had an important session at the Brisbane Writers Festival in September 2006 on protecting journalist sources, featuring Mark Bowling, Michael Meadows, Sarah Stewart, and John Swinson, chaired by our committee member Denise Leith. There will be a keynote Sydney PEN session at this year's Brisbane Writers Festival in September.

Our Sydney Writers' Festival panel for 2007 is on "*The Freedom to Write*" and will feature Eliot Weinberger, Rawi Hage, Bei Ling and Adib Khan, all dissenting voices with a variety of backgrounds. As you will be aware, Sydney PEN's 2006 Sydney Writers Festival panel featured Anna Politkovskaya, who was tragically murdered last October. The Sydney Writers' Festival is holding a special tribute for her this year in which Sydney PEN members will participate.

Negotiations have also been in train for representation at overseas festivals, including Ubud Writers' Festival. That has come to fruition and Sydney PEN member and former president Nick Jose will chair a Sydney PEN panel at the Ubud Festival in September 2007. This is an important step in getting recognition for PEN in Asia, where it is badly under-represented.

Customs House Readings

The monthly Customs House Readings have continued to be very successful. In the past twelve months, our readers were Kate Grenville, Christopher Kremmer, Linda Jaivin, Alison Broinowski, Frank Moorhouse, Rose Zwi, Katherine Thomson, David Malouf, James Bradley, Anne Summers and Nick Jose. Readers for the remainder of 2007 are Elizabeth Stead, Tom Keneally, Anita Heiss, Ashley Hay, and Di Morrissey. We thank all of those writers for their participation in this series of readings and also our former president, Katherine Thomson, for organising the writers in 2006 and Caroline Lurie for her continued assistance, including introducing the writers at the readings. I also thank our committee member Kathy Bail, who took

over Katherine's work in this regard, and who has also assisted in organising a number of other events.

Sydney Mechanics School of Art Events

In the past year, we have had an excellent partnership with Sydney Mechanics School of Arts and have held three events at its premises, including Frank Moorhouse's talk on *Writers in a Time of Terror* in October 2006 and an important panel session in March 2007 on the future of Australian Literature, chaired by Management Committee member Professor Elizabeth Webby and featuring writers Emily Maguire, John Hughes and Delia Falconer.

Day of the Imprisoned Writer

Sydney PEN's Day of the Imprisoned Writer on 12 November 2006 featured a tribute to Anna Politkovskaya and a distinguished panel session entitled '*Silence Please: Censorship in Australia*' chaired by Sydney PEN committee member, Denise Leith. Panellists discussing this important issue were Anne Deveson, writer, broadcaster and documentary filmmaker with a long involvement in human rights issues; Michael Harvey, the Herald Sun journalist charged with contempt for failing to reveal the name of a source; and George Williams, Professor of Law at UTS and co-author of *What Price Security?: Taking Stock of Australia's Anti-terror Laws*. The event was also the occasion of the presentation of the inaugural Sydney PEN Award.

Sydney PEN Award

The Sydney PEN Award was instituted in 2006 to acknowledge outstanding work by a Sydney PEN member in support of PEN's aims. The institution of the award was made possible by the generosity of long term Sydney PEN member, Jane Morgan, and the support of Mr Charles Wolf of The Pen Shop, Sydney. The inaugural award was made to writer and former Sydney PEN committee member, Rosie Scott at the Day of the Imprisoned Writer on 12 November 2006. Sydney PEN's tribute to Rosie can be read on the Sydney PEN website.

International PEN Asia and Pacific Regional Conference in Hong Kong

International PEN held an important Asia and Pacific Regional Conference in Hong Kong from 2 to 5 February 2007, opportunity for PEN centres to meet and work with International PEN to develop common strategies for the future PEN regional plan. The Conference was organised with Hong Kong Chinese speaking PEN, Sydney PEN and Independent Chinese PEN Centres. Chip Rolley, Sydney PEN Vice President, chaired the organising committee and played a pivotal role in the conference. Articles relating to the conference, including articles by Chip, Jeff Errington and Hugo Bowne-Anderson, were published in the May 2007 edition of the Quarterly Magazine (available on the Sydney PEN website).

PEN Keneally Award

The second biennial PEN Keneally Award was awarded in March 2007, to Frank Moorhouse AM. The Award is given by the two Australian PEN Centres, Sydney PEN and Melbourne PEN, in recognition of an achievement in promoting freedom of expression and international understanding and access to literature as expressed in the Charter of International PEN. The Award was \$2,000, the major contributions to that being from Tom Keneally and Random House, with a small contribution from Australian PEN (Sydney PEN and Melbourne PEN).

Frank, who is also a Life Member of PEN, has for many decades made an exceptional contribution to the community of Australian writers in his outspoken advocacy on issues of freedom of expression and copyright reform. The award function was sponsored by the law firm Banki Haddock Fiora and Copyright Agency, and I thank them, Tom Keneally and Random House for their support for this award.

PEN Medallion for Translation

Shortly after taking office, the Management Committee set up a Translation Committee, chaired by Chip Rolley, with Nick Jose, Barbara McGilvray, Julie Rose and Andrew Reimer as members, and later Sally Blakeney after she joined the Management Committee in November 2006. The Translation Committee has been very active, reporting to International PEN on the state of literary translation in Australia and generally working to promote translation.

The Biennial NSW Literary Award and PEN Medallion for translation, an award initiated by Sydney PEN, is awarded in 2007 and Sally Blakeney was the PEN representative on another chair of the judging panel. The award will be given on 28 May 2007. Sally has organised an important Sydney PEN event at the State Library on Wednesday 27 June 2007, *The renewal of things past: Translating Zola & Proust*, featuring Australian translators, Professor Brian Nelson, translator of Zola and James Grieve, translator of Proust.

On behalf of the Management Committee, I thank Chip, Sally and the other members of the translation committee for all their work.

Sydney PEN 3 Writers Project

I would like to announce Sydney PEN's main project for 2007. We have commissioned three of Australia's best writers, all established thinkers, to each write a 10,000 word essay on subjects that of great importance to our society today, both here and overseas: fear, tolerance, prejudice. The essays will be marked by three exciting events, introduced by Sydney PEN Writers Panel members, at which the writers will talk to their essays and then have a discussion with a leading journalist:

- (1) 4 July 2007: introduction by Tom Keneally AO, 35 minute talk by Alexis Wright on "fear", followed by an "in conversation" with Kerry O'Brien.
- (2) 19 September 2007: introduction by David Malouf AO, 35 minute talk by Gideon Haigh on "prejudice", followed an "in conversation" with Ramona Koval.
- (3) 14 November: introduction by David Williamson AO, 35 minute talk by Christos Tsiolkas on "tolerance", followed by an "in conversation" with David Marr,

The three 10,000 word essays will be published by Allen & Unwin in 2008 in a specially packaged book with an introduction by JM Coetzee, Sydney PEN Writers Panel member and a vice-president of International PEN.

Membership

We have also worked hard on membership. In the past 12 months, we have increased membership by at least 50% and this would be a much higher number at present if all 2006 members had renewed. It is a constant problem to get people to renew particularly as we do not have the resources to mail renewals and reminders.

It is extremely important for PEN to keep on increasing its membership, both in the writing community and elsewhere. Membership fees have been deliberately kept low at \$60.00 for full membership and \$30.00 for concessions. Almost 40% of these membership fees are paid to International PEN to assist it in its campaigns and work, so little is left over for Sydney PEN to use for its operations. I ask all of you to encourage your friends and colleagues to join Sydney PEN – we welcome any members who are interested in freedom to read and write. As you know, it is not necessary to be a writer to belong to PEN.

I thank Sally Blakeney and Kathryn McKenzie for their work on membership.

Life Membership

In the past year, life membership of Sydney PEN was awarded to Nick Jose and Katherine Thompson, former presidents of Sydney PEN, and to Tom Keneally AO in recognition of their work for Sydney PEN.

Corporate Members

Another innovation in the past year was the institution of corporate memberships of Sydney PEN. There has been little financial support from the corporate sector for Sydney PEN in the past, so we instituted a corporate membership at \$200.00 per year. Our initial corporate membership drive resulted in 15 members: Allen & Unwin, Australasian Performing Right Association, Copyright Agency Ltd, Currency Press, Dymocks Group, Gleebooks, Hachette Livre, Holding Redlich, John Wiley & Sons, Mallesons Stephen Jaques, Murdoch Books, Pan MacMillan, Penguin Group, Random House and UNSW Press. This is an important development and we hope to strengthen our relationship with corporate members and also, later in 2007, increase that membership.

Members Nights

In a move to have more communication with members, the Management Committee organised three members' nights at new Australian plays at the Griffin Theatre and the Ensemble Theatre. These were very successful and were introduced by the playwrights, all members of Sydney PEN, Louis Nowra, Tommy Murphy and David Williamson. I thank them very much for their support of Sydney PEN.

Sydney PEN Enews

Another innovation, and also part of our objective to communicate more with members, is our regular Enews which commenced in July 2006 and is distributed monthly. One of the primary purposes of the Enews is to communicate with members how to build a strong network within the PEN family. The Enews provides information about Sydney PEN events, legal developments, important news items, International PEN news and other items. The Enews has had a very positive response, including from overseas.

I thank Chip Rolley, Denise Leith and Kathryn McKenzie, for all their work on the Enews.

Sydney PEN Website

The Management Committee has also worked to make our website up to date and informative for members. The website is now hosted by our sponsors, Barnet, which gives us unlimited space and other benefits and I thank them for their support.

The website will however require a complete redesign to make it as effective as we would like it – a project that will take some time. Again, I thank Chip Rolley, Denise Leith and Kathryn McKenzie, for all their work on the website.

Quarterly Magazine

Sandy Symons, a very experienced magazine editor and journalist, joined the Management Committee in July 2006 and took on the role of editing the Quarterly magazine. She has done a marvellous job and I thank her for all her work on this. We have been privileged to have the illustrators, Tom Jellett, create wonderful covers for the last two editions and to have Clive Collins of UTS as art director. I thank them and all the contributors who have helped to make the Quarterly a widely read journal.

Administration

Administration has been a difficult issue for Sydney PEN. It is an organisation of which much is expected, and which has little financial support. Engaging in all the activities that are necessary to be a vibrant PEN Centre takes a lot of work. In addition, there are governance responsibilities, including those that related to our new tax-deductible status. All of this results in a considerable administrative burden which has often been borne by hard working Management Committee members.

We made a huge leap forward in July 2006, however with the appointment of Kathryn McKenzie as our part time executive officer. Kathryn, who administers a number of other not for profit organisations, has made an incredible difference to Sydney PEN, to work and to our communication with members and we are very grateful for her continued work and her diligence.

Finances

We had a number of new Management Committee members join during the last year. One was John Beale, a qualified accountant with publishing experience, came on board to act as Treasurer. His expertise and diligence, combined with the work of our wonderful honorary accountant, Peter Walford, has ensured that Sydney PEN's finances have been very much in order in the past year and I thank them for all their hard work.

Sponsors

UTS has for a number of years been a great supporter of Sydney PEN. Our other staunch supporters include: Copyright Agency, HarperCollins, Peachy Print, Lurdes Borralho, Gleebooks, Random House, Allen & Unwin, and City of Sydney & Customs House Library. This year, we also gained the Scully Fund as a generous supporter. I thank all of them for their effort – it would not be possible for Sydney PEN to operate as it does without them.

I also thank our generous donors, including in particular, Brian and Gene Sherman, Jack Durack, Ros Horin, Rebecca Huntley, Daniela Torsch, Susan Varga, Danny

Gilbert, Neilma Ganter, Patrick Gallagher, Kate Grenville, Katherine Thomson, Rose Zwi, Gillian Rubenstein and Dangerously Poetic Press.

Committee Members

Finally, I would like to thank the wonderful Management Committee members. Firstly, those who standing for re-election this evening: Kathy Bail, John Beale, Sally Blakeney, Jan Forrester, Denise Leith, Sandy Symons and Clare Waters. I have already thanked some of them in relation to particular work they have done, but I should specifically mention Denise Leith, who has been on the committee for four years and whose energy and commitment is boundless. Denise's work for Sydney PEN has been across the spectrum of its activities and without committee members like her, it would not be the organisation that it is.

There are four outgoing members: Chip Rolley, Jack Durack, Lesley McFadzean and Elizabeth Webby. I have already mentioned Chip's work as chair of the Translation Committee. He has also acted as one of the two vice presidents in the past year. He has been a member of the Management Committee for seven years. His contribution has been enormous.

Chip has changed the way Sydney PEN is perceived within the international organization where he is a well-known and highly respected figure. He is responsible for the fact that Sydney PEN is considered to be both in the vanguard of PEN's continual transformation into a more effective organization and also one of the organization's most active and important Centres. He has achieved this in two ways. Firstly, by involving himself at the international level where he has insisted on transparency and procedural propriety. Secondly, by enabling PEN to deal more dynamically with China, a country of major importance to PEN's credibility, as part of a general advocacy of greater Asia-Pacific engagement.

The issue of China arose because of Chip's personal interest and expertise there and in the issues of freedom of expression and human rights more generally in relation to China's advancement. He has brought his understanding to building relationships with Chinese writers, and has helped the independent Chinese PEN centre work effectively within the larger PEN organization, often in highly charged and complex situations. This culminated in his great achievement in co-ordinating the landmark PEN conference in Hong Kong in February. This could not have happened without his work.

His humour, passion, courage, candour, availability, and tirelessness have made him one of the best-known and best-regarded figures in PEN's administrative core. My personal experience working with him in the past year has been that he is amazingly committed, amazingly energetic, and amazingly supportive. And one should not overlook his song-and-dance skills and hearty laugh. I am delighted that Chip has agreed to remain on the Writers in Prison committee, and that his experience and skills will not be lost to Sydney PEN.

Jack Durack has also acted as a vice president in the past year, and again his commitment and support has been admirable. He has been a member of the Management Committee for four years. His work for PEN has been important in very many ways.

As chair of Writers in Prison committee, he has made its work more effective through selective targeting, appropriate approaches, and informed wording. He scared governments because his letters are unanswerable, though he must have an

interesting collection of answers from our own ministers (Vanstone) and others (Indonesia). More broadly, his legal advice helped Sydney PEN's transformation into a properly professional and accountable organization. He presided over necessary constitutional amendments, liaison with government, the application for tax deductibility and for inclusion on the Register of Cultural Organisations, and other procedural matters essential to Sydney PEN's survival as an organization. He always delivered. Jack has always evinced a splendid mix of strategy and passion – and I am delighted that he has agreed to remain Chair of the Writers in Prison committee.

Elizabeth Webby's calm wisdom and substantial experience she brought to bear on issues confronting Sydney PEN were always most valuable, and she was always a considerable source of support. I am delighted that Elizabeth has agreed to remain on our Literature and Literacy subcommittee, which she has chaired in the past year. Lesley McFadzean was always a tireless worker and always supportive, polite and helpful in times of pressure.

It has been such a pleasure working with such a wonderful team.

And, finally, welcome to the new committee members who will be elected tonight. I am delighted that members of the calibre of Kathy Bail and Sally Blakeney are standing for the two positions of vice-president, and that John Beale and Clare Waters are standing again as treasurer and secretary respectively. Mara Moustafine, who has recently stepped down as National Director of Amnesty International Australia will make a brilliant president. Incoming committee members Jane Palfreyman, Ashley Hay, Ben Saul and Carol Dettmann will bring a wide variety of qualities and expertise. The Management Committee members who will lead Sydney PEN for the next 12 months are such a wonderful team of talented and expert people that one can only predict that Sydney PEN will go from strength to strength.