

2020 Annual General Meeting

Chief Executive Officer's address

Ladies and gentlemen, if I had to pick a theme for the year for Engineers Australia, it would definitely be “resilience”.

With COVID-19, we've had to be resilient, and we believe we've also helped our community, our members and our profession... through advocacy, by gathering and sharing information and by harnessing the power of our network of over 100,000 members to respond to requests from governments and others for assistance.

2019-20 was a challenging year. It was also a successful year, as outlined in this Annual Report which is also available on our website.

With thanks to the work of our team of volunteers and staff, we achieved strong progress across a range of areas, and I'd like to congratulate the team on the results.

Being an engineer, I will share some data with you!

- In 2019-20, our total membership grew to 100,911.
- Some years ago, we made a strategic decision to focus our attention on growing non-student membership – and this grew 5% to reach an all-time record of almost 72,750.
- A major part of our role in upholding professional standards is our internationally benchmarked Chartered credential. In 2019-20, the number of Chartered engineers reached 26,400, up 7%.
- A growing number of organisations are partnering with us to develop a credentialled workforce, and our member research shows that desire to become Chartered is a major driver for joining Engineers Australia.

These results demonstrate the value that organisations and individuals place on Chartered.

Our longstanding advocacy for the compulsory registration of engineers bore fruit in 2019-20. This advocacy is based on the importance of engineering professionalism in the interests of community safety. The vast majority of our members support registration. We have, and continue to, consult extensively with our members on the issue.

Both the New South Wales and Victorian Governments passed laws for registration, and we are working with those governments as the accompanying regulations are developed. These laws do not apply as universally as we would like in terms of sectors, and we will work to extend their coverage in future.

Importantly, we are also currently working with the Federal Government towards increased mutual recognition between states.

Over 146,000 people registered for our events in 2019-20, compared to about 92,400 people the year before. COVID-19 spurred us to accelerate improvements in our digital capability, driving this increase. Our improvements include launching online video platform EA OnDemand this year, where you can be inspired and learn from a growing library of videos – currently over 700.

While we are reaching more engineers than before, courtesy of webinars, we recognise the value in face-to-face engagement and are moving to hybrid face-to-face-and-online events.

In 2019-20, our events included the so-called “Olympics of Engineering”, the World Engineers Convention, which we co-hosted with the World Federation of Engineering Organizations in November 2019. WEC was a resounding success on every measure. It was attended by more than 3,000 participants from over 70 countries, feedback was fantastic, and it was a financial success.

WEC was also a fitting finish to our 2019 Centenary celebrations!

Our International Women’s Day events – some of the largest in Australia – continued to grow, with sell-out crowds in three of four cities– just before COVID-19 became a serious local concern, so we were fortunate. The speaker this year was martial artist Nadine Champion.

Next March, we’re beaming in Dr Mae C. Jemison, who’s not only an astronaut and an engineer but a medical doctor and Fortune 500 company director, so I hope you can join us!

This year, we achieved a 30% female gender target established in 2017 for our volunteer office bearer community. However, progress has been uneven, and both the profession and its peak body still have much work to do when it comes to diversity and inclusion.

In addition to gender, our work in diversity has also included support of the activities of our Indigenous Engineers Group and becoming a founding partner – along with Aurecon and Pride in Diversity – of an InterEngineer, an independent industry group for LGBTQI+ engineers and their allies.

Financially, we recorded a strong operating surplus of \$6.8 million across the Engineers Australia Group, adding to our cash reserves, and putting us in a sound financial position that will enable us to face economic headwinds with confidence, and to invest further in the profession.

In 2019-20, our investments in the profession included new and contemporary CBD member facilities in Sydney and Brisbane, as well as the renovation of staff areas in our Chatswood office, where most Sydney staff continue to work.

Board member and Chair of our Audit and Risk Committee, Lucia Cade, will speak further on our financial results shortly but I would also like to briefly publicly acknowledge a very generous bequest of \$1.58 million from the late William “Bill” Hickson. As per Bill’s wishes, we’ve invested this bequest so the proceeds can fund mechanical engineering scholarships, and his generosity will help support further education for generations to come.

As I stood here last year, I outlined plans to hold four industry summits. In February this year, I held a roundtable on engineering responses to climate change. It’s clear that engineers will play a vital role, not only in developing resilience in facing a new climate but in cutting emissions to reduce the extent of damage – and associated destructive weather events.

The importance of this increasingly-urgent challenge was underlined by the dreadful bushfire season of last summer, which Engineers Australia also played a role in responding to, for example by facilitating members who wanted to volunteer, and in being part of the Government’s National Bushfire Recovery Peak Bodies Forum.

As part of our response to COVID-19, I held what grew to be a series of eight roundtables attended by 60 CEOs from business, academia and government. The report is on our website, along with our action plan for COVID-19 recovery.

The final major piece of work I'd like to mention tonight is the development of our three-year strategy, 2020+3 Vision.

The 20|20⁺³ Vision strategy aims to lay the groundwork for the future by helping engineers to become future-ready, increasing our profession's public impact and amplifying the benefits of membership on business and career success.

20|20⁺³ Vision was developed with the benefit of significant input from members and volunteers, as well as data and insights yielded by our qualitative and quantitative research.

On your screen, you can see our five long-term strategies and our purpose. These remain unchanged by the introduction of our 20|20⁺³ Vision for the next three years.

Before I hand over, I'd like to thank our volunteers and our staff for their vital contributions to the progress we've made, and the Board for its leadership.

Back in the early days, when COVID-19 was just a malevolent twinkle in the eye of 2020, the Board asked me to prepare for a range of scenarios, including the risk it might still be with us at end of the Year.

At the time, I thought "the end of the year... that's a bit much!". And, here we are...

Our Board Chair and National President this year has been Chris Champion, whose term will shortly come to an end. I'd like to thank Chris and pay tribute to him, and to his leadership.

Chris has successfully guided Engineers Australia through a very challenging – and, ultimately, successful period. He has been of great support to me, being curious and willing to question while always remaining constructive.

In overseeing the development and adoption of the 20|20⁺³ Vision, he leaves us set on a good course for the future.

Thank you, Chris.

I'd also like to say that I welcome our incoming National President Dr Nick Fleming and look forward to working with him next year, as we seek to build on successes achieved so far.

Tonight, some of you will be recognised as Honorary Fellows of Engineers Australia. My congratulations to you on your leadership within the profession, and your contributions, and my thanks.

I will now hand over to Lucia (Cade) to report on our financial status before taking questions.

Thank you.

Dr Bronwyn Evans
Chief Executive Officer – Engineers Australia
2 December 2020