

2020 Annual General Meeting

National President's address

As a life-long member of Engineers Australia, it's been an honour to serve the profession as a Director and then as the 2020 National President and Board Chair.

You could say I've been EA's first "virtual President" as, other than the first month or two, I've had the challenge of undertaking the role completely remotely.

Even without a pandemic, 2020 would have been a pivotal time. Globally, we're entering the fourth industrial revolution, seeing increasing impacts of climate change and experiencing geopolitical power shifts.

As we gather today, Engineers Australia is both a contemporary organisation and one that's 101 years old.

We are in good shape. We are in a sound financial position. As a voice for the profession, we've engaged widely and helped to shape numerous policy initiatives – including engineer registration, as well as featuring in over 3,000 media items including print, online, radio and TV.

We've made solid progress despite the pandemic and, to an extent, because of it – with regard both to workplace flexibility and the grand "work from home" experiment, and the dramatic and successful expansion of online, and now hybrid, professional development sessions and online STEM initiatives.

This time last year, as Incoming President, I outlined my major priorities – supporting the CEO in order to help the organisation succeed, developing strategy, Chartered credentialing and, externally, making progress on climate change. I will briefly touch on our progress in these areas.

Internally, I wanted to bring out the best in the organisation, the Board and the CEO. It has been my behind-the-scenes priority.

Bronwyn, thank you for your kind words earlier, and, more importantly, thank you for the way you go about being our CEO. The team has responded and performed magnificently under your leadership. You have extended our stakeholder and volunteer reach and engagement more than ever.

Since coming into the role last October, you have been an effective and increasing public face for Engineers Australia – I've encouraged you to be that public face because CEOs are in a position to build a public profile over time, while those in elected positions come and go.

Coming into the role, I was keen to finalise our strategic plan – and I'm particularly pleased at the role I've been able to play in helping our Board and management set our agreed direction for the important three-year period ahead. Our aim is to chase vital strategic shifts, not just incremental change. As the CEO has outlined, there was an enormous amount of consultation and thinking that went into the 2020 Vision.

The needs of volunteers, and their contribution, is crucial to Engineers Australia. Part of the strategic work underway is a review of the Learned Society, which includes one of the most comprehensive ever consultations undertaken with our volunteer leaders. This is a work- in-progress that will be critical to EA's future, and that of the profession.

I am pleased to see our increased focus on the Chartered credential, as witnessed by our record number of Chartered members, and the continued growth and success of our employer workforce credentialing partnerships. We need to continue to work towards a situation in which all engineers, and all members of the engineering team, aspire to be Chartered.

I was also pleased to provide my support for EA's diversity and inclusion programs, and our Indigenous Group.

Navigating the minefield of climate change was never going to be easy. However, this year Engineers Australia has been a platform for, and participated in, some important conversations including the roundtable the CEO mentioned – that I and others from the Board participated in.

The stage is set for Engineers Australia to have a greater commitment in this critical area in future, in accordance with our strategic plan.

I mentioned earlier that Engineers Australia was 101 this year, having had its Centenary last year.

In his Presidential address, our first President, William Henry Warren, raised the desirability of registration for professional engineers. So it is that, all these years later, I can truly describe as "historic" the passing this year of legislation in New South Wales and Victoria of laws providing for the compulsory registration of many engineers.

These requirements will hopefully extend further in the future. I think, in years to come, that will be seen as the lasting achievement of 2019-20 – and I thank and congratulate all involved, over many years. Such achievements are not without their challenges in a federated structure such as Australia.

I would like to congratulate the incoming National President for 2021, Nick Fleming, and to wish him all the best ...and to thank the Board Directors for their support in my role as Chair. Members can be assured that we have a very professional and competent board of directors.

In farewelling you tonight, I'd like to take a moment to say that I look back on my career achievements as an engineer with great satisfaction, even though I have always wanted to achieve more – and I still do!

To me, job and career satisfaction has been all about what can be achieved for our profession and our communities. Engineering has also opened up many opportunities for me internationally.

Engineering is such a great platform to launch any career; not just in the traditional disciplines, but also in business and in leading ANY organisation. This leadership role is just as much a part of the future of the profession, as the technical side of engineering, and the critical contribution of our abilities as creative problem solvers.

Looking forward, I will continue to support Engineers Australia, and its purpose of advancing the science and practice of engineering for the benefit of the community – and to support EA as a life-long member.

Thank you.

Chris Champion
National President and Chair – Engineers Australia
2 December 2020