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**Beaumaris Conservation
Society Inc.**

Association Number A00348878

PO Box 7016

Beaumaris Victoria 3193

95895428, 0429176725

info@bcs.asn.au

www.bcs.asn.au

President's Report to the

65th Annual General Meeting

Ladies and gentlemen good evening and thank you for joining us at what is, remarkably, our 65th Annual General Meeting.

As I considered what to include in this my first President's report, I cast my mind back a year to our 64th AGM when I read to you from someone else's report. The President's report of a man who was then too ill to be present in person. The wonderful, warm-hearted, loyal, tireless, highly-principled, our dear friend, Adrian Cerbasi, who passed away on Australia Day. Adrian, if you can hear us you've given us a very hard act to follow my friend. I want to honour Adrian's memory and to publicly thank him for his many years of selfless commitment to us, and our wider Beaumaris community.

I feel that we who follow in the service of BCS are really standing upon the shoulders of people like Adrian, of all those who have gone before us over the decades. We probably all know of someone who for years selflessly volunteered to preserve the suburb they loved. Let's honour their memory by building an even more formidable defender of our unique, bushland Beaumaris.

There was good news for one of our mainstays, Chris Sutton. Last year at this time Chris was continuing his recuperation from his own serious health issues and we are delighted to report that his health these days is once again robust. As is his contribution to BCS. As many of you will be aware, Chris drafts our objections to inappropriate developments, drafts questions and submissions to Council, appears at Bayside City Council meetings, presents at VCAT and has a significant degree of ongoing communication with local councillors and Council officers on planning matters. A real doer!

To stay with the theme of personalities, it would be remiss of me not to mention our Treasurer of 20 years, Geoffrey Goode. Geoff was plying his abacus in that role at a time when a plane flying over Beaumaris towards Moorabbin Airport could scarcely see the roofs of houses through the tree canopy. I'd like to thank Geoff sincerely for such a herculean effort, and also to wish Jamie Paterson, who is stepping into the role of Treasurer, good luck.

Overall 2016/2017 has been an extraordinary, eventful year for BCS.

Let there be no doubt, when I took on the role of President last September the Society was in trouble. Progressively declining membership numbers, difficulty in attracting volunteers to fill Committee roles, having to shrink the number of Zones to reflect this, and even consideration of what would happen to the Society's savings were we to fold!

Since then however, well we have rarely been out of the news.

One might have been forgiven for thinking that would likely have been due to a need to finally ramp up one of our major campaigns "[Saving Beaumaris Bay from a Huge Marina](#)". But not so! In fact, all these years down the track we still await commencement of an Environmental Effects Statement process, which we were last informed might commence in early June. So, whilst *behind* the scenes much significant work has and is being done to prepare our opposition to the selfish proposal by BMYS - in particular work by the amazing Associate Professor Vicki Kotsarilos and our own Dr Shirley Prager - we must patiently continue to wait and be ready to spring into action on receiving what will probably be quite short notice.

What in fact did kick things off with a bang a month or so after our last AGM was an attempted [sneak attack](#) by the Victorian School Building Authority ("VSBA") to cut down hundreds of trees on the Beaumaris Secondary School site - and not for the school itself - almost solely to clear the way for private sports club facilities for the Beaumaris Soccer Club and the Melbourne Cricket Club. As it turned out I learned about this at an October meeting I'd been invited to with representatives of the Friends of Long Hollow and Friends of Balcombe Park. Once we had this information, we brought the resources of BCS to bear and with the invaluable help of one of our new Committee members Wendy Parker, who just happens to be a publicist, our protest with hundreds of people at the school gates was the opening news story, nationwide. In the result, we brought the Beaumaris community with us, stopped any trees being cut down, forced a consultation, engaged arborists, held numerous onsite and off-site meetings with the VSBA, and ultimately saved a number of trees from being lost forever. Whilst we didn't achieve all that we would have hoped for, nevertheless we also did achieve [more space and an indigenous replanting palette](#), rather than the exotic and invasive species which had been planned. There are trees there that preceded the arrival of the white man that will be standing for another couple of hundred years because of our efforts. All this, whilst achieving invaluable exposure for BCS on TV, radio and across the print media. Exposure equals carrying more clout when we engage on an issue, more members by number, and more volunteers willing to get involved.

We have other campaigns of course. On the subject of our [Reducing Beaumaris foreshore's over-abundance of signs campaign](#), I can report that Bayside City Council proposed a rationalization in its *Ricketts Point Signage Style Guide* and we were recently informed that very shortly we should expect to see the results of that rationalization, towards which of course we provided comments and suggestions.

A highlight of our year, and a hugely satisfying and very visible victory at the heart of Beaumaris, concerned our Campaign 2002, [Keeping the Concourse Green and Concourse Bushland intact](#). Once again we succeeded in protecting the Green, thanks directly to the committed efforts of a number of your Committee members and fellow BCS members who together gathered 861 signatures on a petition which was formally presented to Council. To back this up, a number of us also then spoke at Council's Ordinary Meeting which determined to reject the external consultant's recommendations and instead, agreed that the Concourse Green should indeed be kept green, not have boulders dumped on it (for a Beaumaris feel!!), trees cut down or a dominating shelter foisted upon us.

Recently, we have formally requested that Bayside City Council name, and change the zoning of, three distinct [parcels of land abutting Holding Street](#) to keep them in public ownership, prevent their sale to adjoining private owners and perhaps in due course permit some additional indigenous planting. We will keep pursuing this until we have achieved the outcome we seek.

As we know we live under the supposed protection of a VPO covering Beaumaris and Black Rock. A [Vegetation Protection Overlay](#) which we the residents actually fought very hard to achieve. For too long compliance with that law has been paid lip-service, at best. Well, I can inform you that changing that situation is front and centre for your Committee and we are now working closely with Bayside City Council to ensure that people are educated about it, that it is heavily enforced, and that it is interpreted correctly. We have come to the conclusion that arborists opinions are not relevant, and never should have been. The thrust of what we will be pushing is that the VPO is meant to be a protection of the whole, of an area, and so the health, shape or form, or life-estimate of individual trees is not the criteria which decides whether they live or die. The natural environment has a mix of all stages of new and old growth, much like this room, even dying or dead trees contribute habitat and such a spread is actually important for the life of the local fauna as well. You can expect to see much more in this VPO space, including follow-ups of people who promise to replant but suddenly have terrible luck with keeping the new plantings alive, and possibly a barrister's opinion on the subject so VCAT also understands its duty to follow the law! Enough is enough.

Thanks to our Secretary Chris Costley we now have the ability for new and renewing BCS members to pay online via credit card. And, with the help of our new Committee members we have a new clean, modern looking website being developed, our [social media presence](#) is about to ramp up significantly, there are new events in planning where our members can come together, and a membership drive ahead of us.

As some of you may know I'm a lawyer in my day job. Our [BCS Constitution](#) is 20 years old this year. It needs to be reviewed to ensure that whilst it remains compliant with the law, at the same time your Committee can meet and get through its considerable work with greater ease and versatility.

Even before a membership drive such a high level of activity and increased public exposure for BCS over the past year has resulted in an increase in our membership numbers for the first time in some years, and has also attracted the interest of those willing to step up and join your [Management Committee](#). So much so, that this year we have had more people contemplating joining Committee than we have places to accommodate them. Most of your new Committee are present here tonight and shortly you will hear from them individually concerning what they bring to Committee, and their hopes and plans for expanding and reinvigorating this historic Society.

The challenge for BCS is to remain the historic, respected organisation we know it to be whilst reinventing how it achieves its goals, how it communicates, so that it remains relevant in an ever more rapidly changing world. We need both to continue to embrace and serve our long-term loyal members, but also attract new blood, and educate the children, the next generation of Beaumaris people to love and protect this our home. We are part of the very fabric of Beaumaris and we intend to remain so.

Ladies and gentlemen on that optimistic note I'll conclude the President's Report for this the 65th year of our wonderful Beaumaris Conservation Society Incorporated.

Gregory Mier
BCS Inc. President

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