



Alexandra Ross – Sunset Tracking. 2018 ESA Photo Competition section A student's life in the field - celebrating 30 years of the Holsworth Endowment

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This strategy builds on our past two 5-year strategic plans by formalising links between working groups and the ESA's overall goals. The plan was built during 2019, beginning with working groups who brought their 5 year action plans to a workshop held in June 2019. Working group members, and the ESA board refined and synthesised the action list, alongside formalising ESA's Mission, Vision and Values. With follow up work over the subsequent months, we are very happy to now present the 2020-2024 strategic plan. This document outlines the context, higher level goals and operational aspects of the plan. The accompanying on-line appendix is the living document that details working group's actions, timeframes and progress, and is updated as working groups build and implement their portfolio of activities.



Don A. Driscoll
President 2017-2019



Bek Christensen
President 2020-

Ecological Society of Australia 2019. Strategic plan 2020-2024. Melbourne, Australia.

1. Ecological Society of Australia Mission, Vision and Values

MISSION

The ESA fosters excellence in ecological science and practice. We create an inclusive community to support research and knowledge sharing to better understand ecological systems. We apply this knowledge for the benefit of people and nature.

VISION

The Society achieves its mission through:

1. Science

- a. fostering excellence in the scientific study of all organisms in relation to their environment;
- b. fostering conservation and ecological management of biodiversity;

2. Knowledge sharing

- c. acknowledging, respecting, and facilitating inclusion of indigenous biocultural knowledge;
- d. sharing ideas and information about ecology among the Society's Members, ecologists, other professional disciplines, organisations and the general public;
- e. providing a trusted voice on ecological matters;
- f. working with government and other groups in matters where the application of ecological principles are relevant including advice on policy and management;
- g. fostering connection between the broader community and the environment;
- h. supporting ecological education;

3. The ESA Community

- i. facilitating a diverse and inclusive community of people with interests in ecology
- j. fostering the development and progression of people through diverse ecologically-aligned career pathways;
- k. advocating for the needs of members;
- l. encouraging professional and ethical standards among the Society's Members and other ecologists.

Values

Excellence in science – We foster excellence in ecological science which underpins all of our activity.

Biodiversity – We value biodiversity for its intrinsic significance and fundamental importance for people.

Knowledge sharing – Sharing knowledge is important for helping us achieve excellence in science, and promote effective stewardship of nature.

Our Members– Developing skills, careers, professional networks and upholding the values of our members is at the core of our Society.

Inclusivity – We value a Society built on community, acceptance, and respect; creating a welcoming and supportive environment for all.

2. Operating Environment

The ESA is one of many Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) societies operating within Australia, and countless more operating internationally. According to a recent review of STEM associations and societies in Australia, approximately half of Australian STEM societies have not experienced a growth in membership [1]. In contrast, the ESA continues to experience slowly increasing member numbers year to year. This has not happened by accident, and is a result of the efforts of previous Boards and the many volunteers that contribute to the Society and its activities.

The Review identified key features of societies experiencing growth, which include that they:

- Are involved in national representation for their stakeholder community,
- Help to shape the national STEM agenda through their own activities and/or by contributing to national bodies,
- Are committed to diversity and inclusivity, and invest resources in tangible actions to enhance participation and inclusion of diverse groups,
- Demonstrate value to Australian society,
- Target recruitment initiatives to different audiences, and offer membership fees on a sliding scale (e.g. discounted student rates),
- Have an active and up to date member database, and
- Facilitate and promote creation and dissemination of knowledge (e.g. through conferences).

The ESA already actively pursues each of those points, and this Strategic Plan provides a clear pathway for continued attention to these and other areas of activity within the Society, with a view to growing the Society and maintaining a high and relevant level of service for its members.

For example, ecologists in Australia are increasingly finding employment across a wider range of areas than in the past. The ESA aspires to grow its membership base into audiences including indigenous researchers and professionals, researchers working outside of publicly-funded research organisations, and ecologists working in industry whether they be self-employed or working for a large company. Thus, the ESA will explore new ways to engage and provide value to members in different professional contexts, while continuing to provide services to our existing member base.

As reflected in our core values and mission, the ESA is committed to excellence in science. This commitment underpins our integrity and reputation as a professional scientific body. Upholding these standards as an organisation and supporting our members to uphold high standards is increasingly important in a broader society with growing levels of distrust or disrespect for science and scientific organisations.

Our commitment to excellence in science is also important in light of recent performance declines in science and maths amongst Australian students. Creating connections to support improved science education, and making ecology a core component of education, will be important to excite and engage the next generation of ecologists.

Growing distrust of science and disregard of science in developing environmental policy not only demands heightened rigour in the science that we do, but also that we honestly and openly communicate our discoveries and their implications. Improving capacity for science

communication and policy outreach in the current socio-political environment is crucial for achieving ESA's mission and adhering to our values.

Sustaining the ESA's sound governance and financial management is also critical for continued success of the Society. These things cannot be taken for granted, and require regular reflection and attention to ensure the organisation has appropriate oversight, structures, and ways of working to be effective. Current changes to the academic publishing landscape, particularly in relation to open access, pose both opportunities and risks for ESA to explore in relation to its publishing income. While not requiring immediate action from the Society, activities outlined in this Strategic Plan will ensure the ESA explores the implications of this changing context so it can make informed decisions.

[1] Associations and Societies Review 2019, Science and Technology Australia

[2] Report Card 2018: The Wellbeing of Young Australians (2018). The Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY): <https://www.aracy.org.au/publications-resources/area?command=record&id=266&cid=21>



Nicholas Chu –Night spotlight surveys with an alright view. ESA Photo Competition 2018. Outstanding in the field: Ecologists in Action

3. ESA Aims 2020-2024

The ESA has six broad aims, each with sub-aims that are overseen by the President, Vice Presidents or the Board, and are implemented by working groups (Table 1). Appendix 1 shows the actions to be implemented by each working group, their objectives, KPIs, timetable and priority for implementation.

Table 1. Summary of aims and responsibility for implementation

Aims	Oversight	Working Group
Aim 1. Deliver innovative, high quality, financially viable ecological journals		
1.1 Increase journal reach and impact	VP, Science and applications	Journals, Practitioner
1.2 Maintain a program of continuous innovation to deliver high quality, financially viable, ecological journals		Journals
Aim 2. Run the leading national ecological conference and other events.		
2.1 Ensure annual conference remains premier ecology conference in Australia	VP, Membership services	Conference, Post-Grad Day
2.2 Foster equity and diversity at the conference		Conference, Equity and Diversity
2.3 Improve conference governance		Conference
2.4 Run or contribute to additional knowledge sharing events		Research Chapter, Conference, Financial Governance
Aim 3. Improve the role of indigenous ecologists in the society and enhance two-way knowledge sharing		
3.1 Develop a clear and shared understanding of protocols, intellectual property rights, and cultural awareness of Indigenous Biocultural Knowledge	VP, Science and applications	Indigenous Engagement
3.2 Creating inclusive avenues for knowledge sharing		Indigenous Engagement
3.3 Fostering and promoting best practice indigenous engagement through recognition and awards		Indigenous Engagement
Aim 4. Develop and deliver innovative programs of support and services for members		
4.1 Directly support PhD research by delivering the Holsworth Wildlife Research Endowment program	President	Holsworth
4.2 Develop and deliver support and training opportunities for Early Career Ecologists	VP, Next generation	Early Career Ecologists
4.3 Develop Ecological Education working group and establish community of practice/resources for educational purposes		Education
4.4 Facilitate access to training and other services for practitioners	VP, Science and applications	Practitioner
4.5 Provide and promote opportunities for links between practitioners and researchers		Practitioner

Aims	Oversight	Working Group
4.6 Publicise research-management collaborative success		Student Awards, Research Awards, Practitioner, Early Career Ecologists
4.7 Recognise achievements by members through awards		Student Awards and affairs, Research Awards, Practitioner, Early Career Ecologists
4.8 Support and promote research chapters to facilitate research collaboration		Research Chapter
4.9 Membership support	VP, Membership services	Membership
Aim 5. Improve understanding of ecology and integrate ecological and conservation principles into society		
5.1 Build strategic partnerships with value-aligned organisations to enable policy and outreach activities	VP, Public outreach and policy	Policy, Academic Freedom
5.2 Build the capacity of ESA members to engage with government, policy makers, media and the general public		Policy, Media, Academic Freedom
5.3 Ensure ESA is a trusted voice on ecological matters with parliamentarians and policy makers		Policy, Hot Topics
5.4 Identify and develop the next generation of communicators /voice of ecology		Media
5.5 Increase ecological literacy and awareness of ecological issues		Policy, Media, Hot Topics
5.6 Increase the profile of the ESA, its members, and ecology		Media, Bulletin
5.7 Promote the free and open exchange of ecological information		Academic Freedom
5.8 The ESA is the 'go-to' group for ecological knowledge in Australia		Policy
Aim 6. Corporate aims: maintain best practice governance, including ensuring equity and diversity across the activities of the society and excellent membership services		
6.1 Achieve long term financial sustainability	Board	Finance Governance, Practitioner
6.2 Best Practice Governance		Finance Governance, Board, Practitioner
6.3 Capture data for effective provision of membership services		Board and Membership
6.4 Enhance External Communications and Reach		Board and Finance Governance
6.5 Foster equity and diversity		Equity and Diversity

4. How we work; enablers

ESA Structure

Working Groups are the core enablers of the ESA (Figure 1). Working Groups consist of a set of voluntary members, one of whom is the Chair. The Chair is responsible for organising meetings, recruiting members and coordinating actions of the working group. The Working Group chair is also responsible for providing monthly updates to the portfolio leader to keep the Board abreast of activities, and seeks approval from the board for new initiatives.

Portfolio leaders are the President, Vice Presidents and Treasurer, who enable frequent communication between Working Groups and the Board. They often act as the Chair of one or more Working Groups in their portfolio.

The ESA's paid staff professionally enact the core ESA functions relating to finance, media, grants and corporate responsibilities. The Executive Officer also maintains oversight of the ESA, contributes to effective operation of Working Groups and raises new initiatives in collaboration with the President and other Board members.

Resources (website, financial and otherwise)

Critical resources enabling ESA activities include:

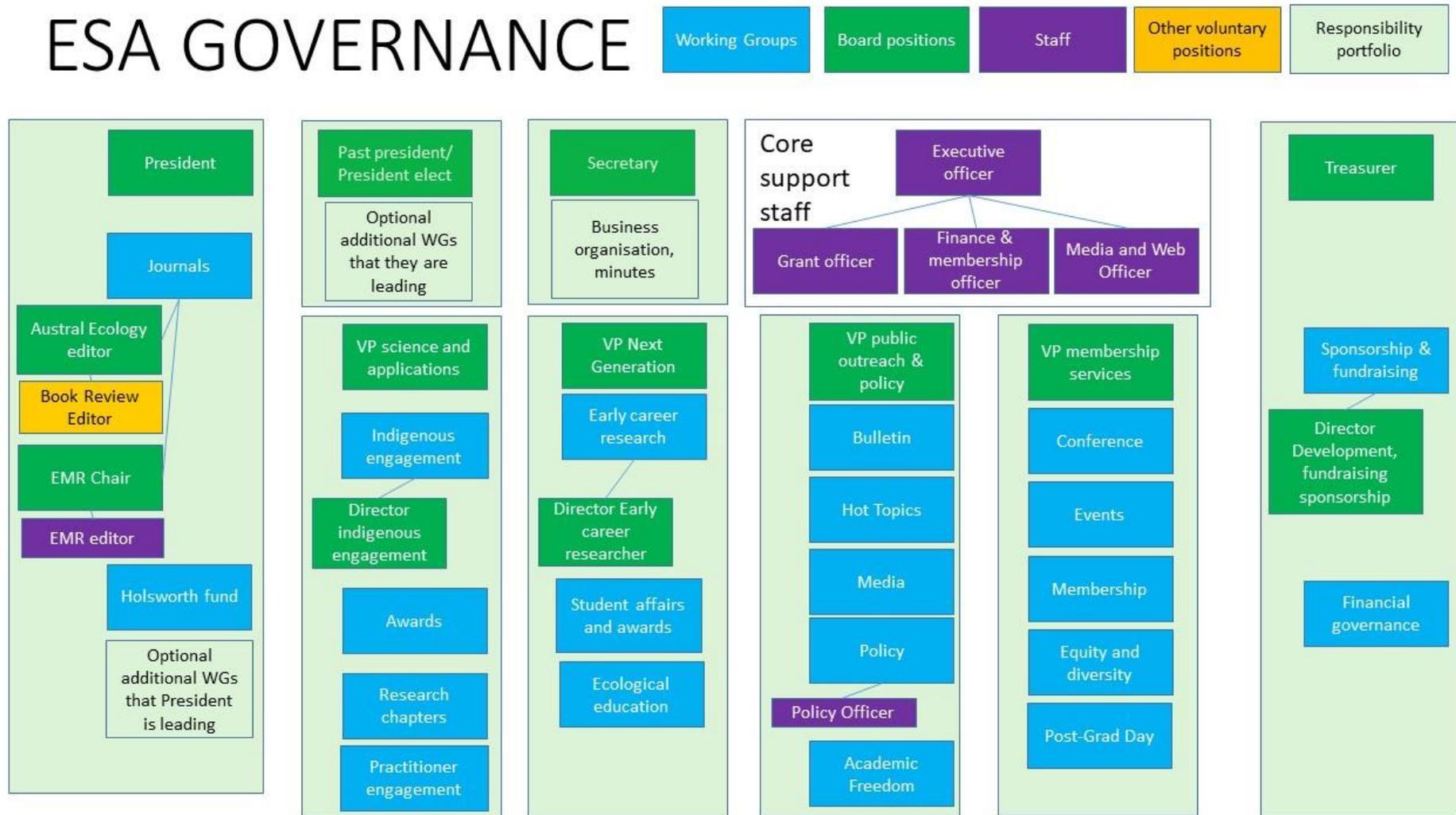
- Strong income streams to support staff and fund initiatives
- Effective, efficient and adaptive financial management
- Interactive website facilitating all activities of the ESA including internal and external communication, networking, grants, awards and events management.
- Effective online membership data-base
- Active social media accounts
- Strategic training for staff, Board and Working Group members to ensure outstanding capacity.

Our approach and ways of working

The ESA's Board and Working Groups will take a common approach to their work as follows:

1. Be guided by our Mission, Vision and Values
2. Hold our Values sacrosanct in spite of inducements for compromise.
3. Seek to challenge the status quo in the pursuit of excellence.
4. Always act ethically and legally.
5. Explore all opportunities while considering risks.
6. Collaborate in preference to duplicating the activities of other organisations.
7. Engage in science-informed advocacy when it aligns with our Mission, Vision and Values.
8. Refuse to become partisan.
9. Be inclusive, welcoming and open to considering all viewpoints.

Figure 1. ESA governance structure.



5. Progress and review

The ESA Board and Working Groups will use this Strategic Plan to guide their activities for the coming five years. In a rapidly changing world, we anticipate that some actions in this Strategic Plan will not be implemented, some will change in scope and timelines, and new initiatives we are not yet aware of will be added to the ESA's activities. To that end this Plan remains a living document enabling the Society to respond effectively to change and opportunity.

The ESA's mission, vision, and values provide a common understanding to ground the work of the Board and Working Groups, and our agreed aims, structure, and ways of working equip the Society with a sound framework to evaluate new opportunities or proposed changes to the Plan.

The Strategic Plan will be actively used by the Board and Working Groups as follows:

- Monthly - Working Groups update VP on progress against activities specified in Strategic Plan. VP provides updates to the board.
- September each year – Working Groups review Strategic Plan activities identified for following financial year, determine if any need to be pushed back in timeline, adjusted, or removed. Identify new initiatives that should be added. Identify priorities that may require funding support in following financial year. Evaluate progress to date against strategic plan. Report to VP.
- October – VPs use Working Group input to prepare annual year in review, reporting progress against Strategic Plan. VPs identify funding needs and/or new initiatives for the following financial year to discuss at Planning Day.
- November – all Board meets at Annual Planning Day to review progress against Strategic Plan, amend Strategic Plan as required (new initiatives, changed timelines, activities in the Plan that have become irrelevant), prioritise activities requiring funding in the following financial year.
- March/April – budget bids from VPs and Working Groups due with Financial Governance Working Group.
- June – Financial Governance Working Group confirms budget for next financial year?
- The detailed strategic plan (Appendix 1) can be updated by working groups by:
 - downloading the spreadsheet
 - making and documenting changes
 - submitting proposed changes to the Board for approval, including justification of why the changes are strategic and are consistent with the plan's intention.
 - the board transfers approved changes to the web-office to make the on-line changes.

Appendix 1. A spreadsheet detailing actions that working groups will implement, timeframes and KPIs is available online.