



## **President's report to the Annual General Meeting:**

**Sisters in Crime Australia Inc.**

**October 2025**

**Kelly Gardiner**

As we foreshadowed at our last AGM, this has been a time of huge transition for Sisters in Crime – and it's not over yet.

As many of you know, Carmel Shute is stepping back after 35 years, and will focus on Programming from now on. So we've been putting into place new structures and processes to make sure we can continue to deliver on our aims and promises. We also want to share the load and involve a broader and more diverse group of women.

### **Highlights**

Sisters in different states have been working on establishing or re-establishing local chapters – we provide them with a float and bank account and they work together to create events appropriate to their states. These of course vary greatly in geographic scale, and factors such as supportive libraries and bookshops interested in crime writing. A great example are the recent literary dinners in Brisbane and the Gold Coast organised by Queensland sisters. The Western Australian Chapter is relaunching this weekend at the Big Sky Readers & Writers Festival in Geraldton.

Among our many dedicated volunteers are the members of the book review team. We published 90 book reviews last year and focused on creating better engagement across social media, especially Instagram, so readers know when reviews of their next favourite books are published. We are restructuring the book reviews system over the coming months, to refresh it and make it more relevant for social and visual media.

One of the hits was our Holiday Reads campaign, which features favourite summer reading suggested by author members, Davitt judges, and volunteers, to keep crime readers happy over the long summer days.

We advertised for volunteers in Events and Communications – to be met with great enthusiasm. This is so important, as we have 4175 subscribers across the country and beyond receiving our monthly e-newsletter, A Stab in the Dark, and many more thousands people using the website and following on Facebook and Instagram. 20 members a month receive a free crime novel through Crime Stack, our enewsletter giveaway, and our website continues to connect writers and readers through monthly features on new books, writing tips and author profiles.

Stay tuned for new approaches to our online offerings in the near future.

## **Awards**

Another highlight of the year was the long, and successful process that is the Davitt awards.

In the first year of the awards there were 7 entries. Last year, the 25<sup>th</sup> Davitt Awards attracted 153 entries, and judges worked together for eight months to read and judge the best books of the year.

We made several significant changes to the Davit Awards during the year:

We changed the timeframe for judges and introduced an Earlybird entry system, which was a huge success. We also recognised our beloved Kerry Greenwood by naming the Readers' Choice Award in her honour.

Thanks to a generous donation from Leslie Falkiner-Rose and the Ruffin Falkiner Foundation, we were able to introduce prize money for Davitt winners for the first time in 25 years.

Although the ceremony itself was not held in the financial year we're discussing this evening, we can say that we decided to move both it and the Scarlett Stiletto Awards ceremony to a new, and larger venue – after much deliberation settling on the Angliss Restaurant in Melbourne's CBD, which is fully accessible and more central.

The Scarlet Stiletto Awards also had another huge year, with 195 entries. We celebrated the winners and highly commended authors with a fun ceremony right here at the Rising Sun, featuring Candice Fox and Sarah Bailey, and I have to say some spectacular outfits. We were particularly thrilled that 15-year-old Rose Mebrhatu, the winner of the Allen & Unwin Award for Best Young Writer Award came from Sunshine with her mother, aunty, and two sisters. One of the joys of the Scarlet Stiletto Awards is seeing new and emerging writers here with family and friends, celebrating their achievement.

Seventy-six Scarlet Stiletto-winning stories are available on our podcast, hosted by Susanna Lobez, and you can find them free on Spotify, Amazon Music, and wherever you get your podcasts.

## **Events**

Sisters in Crime has been under siege by publishers, libraries, festivals, other organisations, and some keen authors to provide more and more opportunities to connect readers and writers. With the exception of the years when we held conventions, we've never held more events. We've loved having Catie Maher and Carolyn Beasley on the Programming Committee with Carmel and Ruth.

Our regular Melbourne events, like this evening, have continued apace, with author panels and the inevitable raffles every month except at the height of summer. They have included topics from mountain misadventures to Regency murder mysteries, to death in cold climates,

We held our 19th Law Week event in May, Murder, She Investigates, with a panel hosted by Judge Betty King. RN Big Ideas recorded it, but it hasn't made to air. It may have been too naughty.

We partnered with public libraries and bookshops to run events in Brighton, Beaumaris, Sandringham, Preston, Ringwood, Sunbury, Readings State Library, and St Kilda, as well as a session at Clunes Booktown.

## **Behind-the-scenes**

Those are the more visible things, but there's an awful lot that goes on in the background, from planning events to managing member data. A few behind-the-scenes preoccupations last year include setting up a new structure and processes for volunteer recruitment and management – and our first Volunteer Coordinator – at present, Ruth Wykes. That meant creating a raft of position descriptions, writing a handbook, and thinking through all our priorities and how best to approach them.

We applied for and were granted a nonprofit suite of Microsoft programs that will make online collaboration and record-keeping much easier.

We've focused on building membership and getting renewals smoother so that we now have 612 paid-up members plus six life members. We know the renewals system still has a few kinks in it but we're working on that.

## Acknowledgements

I'll close with some thank yous, firstly to the many volunteers who make Sisters in Crime run. We exist on your generosity.

Many thanks to the convenors who have worked with me over the past 12 months:

- Carmel Shute
- Ruth Wykes
- Moraig Kisler
- Lesley Gillis
- Lindy Cameron.

It's a huge amount of work planning and delivering all the activities of this organisation, completely on volunteer labour, and the conveyors meet every month, and sometimes more often, with a big list of tasks to get done every time.

Sadly, we had to farewell two convenors: our communications convenor, Sara Hood, and fundraising guru Leslie Falkiner-Rose.

Leslie is continuing to be our on-call auctioneer and when Sara returns from overseas we're going to rope her back in as a volunteer.

I would also like to pay tribute to:

- Fran Gillis who is here staffing the door and running the raffle every month.
- Our book-keeper, Robyn Young, and our membership administrator, Annette Pearce, who keep us on the straight and narrow, or try to.
- The Davitt and Scarlet Stiletto Award judges, who have to make the hard decisions.
- Ruth Wykes who, besides being a convenor and Davitts Judge, also administered both the Davitts and Scarlet Stiletto Awards to ensure their confidentiality and efficiency.
- State-based convenors working to increase the reach and engagement of Sisters in Crime, and bring authors and readers together.
- All our award sponsors including Swinburne University of Technology, and the many Australian publishers who generously support both the Davitt and Scarlet Stiletto Awards, donate books for our raffles and Crime Stack, and work with us to include as many authors as possible in our events.
- Deb Force and the outstanding team at the Sun Bookshop, our official bookseller at events, and online.
- Christina Lee who flies down from Brisbane at her own expense to run the Scarlet Stiletto Award judging weekends.
- Murder Monday host with the most, Jacq Ellem.
- Podcast star Susanna Lobez and audio producer Tim Coy.
- Tireless volunteer designer Caz Brown.

- Jon and Analiese Woolley, Jess Scott, and the wonderful team at the Rising Sun Hotel.
- Mark Barry from BS Sound who does a sterling job setting up the PA system for our events.

And most especially thanks to all of you, our members, for sticking with us through challenging times. Thank you.

### **Life membership awards**

Finally, I have an announcement. On behalf of the national convenors of Sisters in Crime, or at least a secret subset of them, I would like to award Life Membership of Sisters in Crime Australia to Carmel Shute and Lindy Cameron, in recognition of their more than three decades of tireless work and inspiration.