President's report to the Annual General Meeting:

Sisters in Crime Australia Inc.

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Kelly Gardiner

This has been another dynamic and successful year for Sisters in Crime, with a new approach to key events, broader volunteer base, and the continued transition of founding and new volunteers. The awards and events are our most visible (and fun!) activities, and also form the most demanding workload, and I'd like to acknowledge the many volunteers who make them happen, across the country. This will continue to be a major focus.

Awards

The Davitt awards had another hugely successful year, its 25th, celebrated at the ceremony hosted by Cate Kennedy and with the guest of honour Ellie Marney. The convenors would like to thank Leslie Falkiner-Rose and the Ruffin Falkiner Foundation, for their generous donation which meant we were able to award prize money to the Davitt winners for the first time.

In the first year of the awards there were seven entries. The 25th Davitt Awards attracted 151 entries - an indication of the growth and continued strength of women's crime writing in this country. As chief judge Ruth Wykes said at the time, "Australian women's crime writing has well and truly come of age." The Davitts acknowledge the diversity and power of Australian women writers in the worlds of crime fiction and true crime for readers of all ages.

But we also have a conscious strategy of supporting the development of future Davitt winners and emerging writers. We hope to do more in this space in the coming months, but that is, in part, the reason for the existence of the Scarlet Stiletto Awards. The Scarlet Stilettos also had another huge year, with a record-breaking

231 entries. We celebrated the winners and highly commended authors with a ceremony hosted by Amanda Hampson, with prizes presented by Dinuka McKenzie.

A wide range of 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.

This year, the Scarlet Stiletto and Davitt Awards ceremonies moved to a more accessible venue, William Angliss (and in this calendar year to the Stamford Plaza). We now have an Awards Project Team of volunteers which works together across event production, programming, communications and fundraising to produce these two major events.Thanks to everyone who worked on the Awards this year, especially the judges who spend hours and hours reading and debating.

Events

Sisters in Crime currently organises regular events for readers and writers in Victoria, Western Australia, South Australia and Queensland. These include author panels, spotlights, and conversations, workshops, launches, literary lunches and dinners, and even Crime with Wine. Major events this year include the legendary High Tea celebration in honour of our beloved and greatly missed Kerry Greenwood. The celebration of Kerry's life and legacy took place, appropriately, at the Windsor Hotel, where the Hon. Phryne Fisher first stayed on her return to Melbourne.

For the twentieth time we presented a special event as part of Law Week in Victoria - this year, the very topical 'A is for Arsenic, D is for Death Cap'. Regular event topics ranged from cosy crime to interviews with judges or policewomen, true crime, self-publishing, with debut authors to our biggest names.

We also hold events including book launches and author interviews in partnership with public libraries, bookshops, and events such as Rare Book Week or local literary festivals such as Clunes Booktown and Totally Lit in Fremantle, and will continue to seek out opportunities to engage more closely with community partners and the book industry.

One theme continues to haunt us - in fiction and nonfiction, in our discussions, and in our world: the ongoing epidemic of violence against women in this country, and the fact that so many of the victims and survivors of violent crimes are women and children.

A question for writers and readers of crime fiction and especially true crime must be: what role does our writing, podcasting, reading, or watching play in the understanding and portrayal of crimes against women in the media and in publishing in Australia and beyond? How do we honour the grief and trauma crime causes? So many of our authors have thought and cared deeply about these issues and changed crime writing for the better.

Our volunteer community

We have continued our focus on volunteer transition, as founder Carmel Shute steps back from the many roles she has performed over the last thirty years. This is her last AGM as a convenor and I want to again acknowledge her incredible contribution to Sisters in Crime, and to women's crime writing in this country. Carmel will continue to be part of our programming committee and will forever be a legend in Sisters in Crime.

Dawn Farnham, Sarah Evans, Sam McKinnon and Lisa Ellery launched the Western Australian chapter and its events last October, while Poppy Gee and Harrie Blake host events for Queensland readers and writers - the geographical distances in both states requiring unique approaches. Chapters in Tasmania and NSW are in the process of developing their own programs - the national organisation supports state chapters with a financial float and encouragement, but they each know best what will work in their diverse regions.

We'd particularly like to acknowledge the work of Samantha Battams in South Australia who is stepping down, and thank her for all her work over seven years, since she established the SA chapter.

Sisters in Crime receives no funding from government cultural agencies and we don't as a rule conduct major fundraising campaigns - but this is one area in which we need to focus to ensure that the organisation is more sustainable and that we can continue, for example, to award prize money to deserving award winners. We are looking for advice and involvement from any of our members or supporters with expertise in this area, so if that's you, please get in touch.

Acknowledgements

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

- Carmel Shute
- Ruth Wykes
- Moraig Kisler
- Lesley Gillis
- Lindy Cameron
- Maryanne Vagg
- Christina Lee

Sadly, Christina and Maryanne stepped down as convenors but can't escape being asked for advice from time to time.

Sarah Jackson, Poppy Gee and Kelly Marshall have recently joined us and we are very pleased to have them on board. This is Lesley Gillis's final AGM as Treasurer

and we would like to thank her for the many many years of dedicated service to Sisters in Crime - happily, Lesley will continue to be in charge of front-of-house at our Melbourne events, with her sister Fran, who is always here staffing the door and running the raffle every month. The GIllis sisters have even sponsored a new *cat*-egory in the Scarlet Stiletto Awards this year, such is their dedication to crime writing, and to cats.

I would also like to pay tribute to:

- Our communications and events teams: Paula Lane, Lee Adendorff, Olivia di le Santis, Lidia Hastewell, Bianca Lowe and Kelly Marshall.
- Our book-keeper, Robyn Young, and our membership administrator, Annette Pearce
- The Davitt and Scarlet Stiletto Award judges
- The book review team, who read and review the latest titles to make sure women's crime writing gets intelligent reviews and readers know what to put on their wishlists - and special thanks to Sara Hood for co-ordinating and editing.
- A special shout-out to the indefatigable 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, and coordinated volunteers AND book reviews!
- 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 Melbourne events, and online.
- Christina Lee who flies to Melbourne from Brisbane at her own expense to run the Scarlet Stiletto Award judging weekends.
- The wonderful teams at the Rising Sun Hotel and all our venue partners.
- Mark Barry from BS Sound who does a sterling job setting up the PA system for our Melbourne events.

And most especially thanks to all of you, our members and supporters - Sisters in Crime and Brothers in Law - writers and readers, across the country and beyond.