

ISFAR Research Committee: Perspectives

The co-chairs of the Research Committee, Alexis Bergantz and Elizabeth Rechniewski, have been asked, as a counterpart to retiring chair Colin Nettelbeck's article in *The French Australian Review* no. 68, to reflect on the perspectives for the Committee over the next decade.

2020 saw a number of changes to the Committee, with some key figures resigning their positions: the chair, Colin Nettelbeck, who has been the driving force behind the *French-Australian Dictionary of Biography (FADB)* and central to so many of ISFAR's activities, withdrew from the Committee. Two other members resigned or retired: Peter Brown, who remains a valued contact at the University of French Polynesia and Ivan Barko, whose loss is keenly felt but whose experience and insight continue to be of great assistance to the new committee and particularly to the co-chairs who replaced Colin, Alexis Bergantz and Elizabeth Rechniewski. The decision to create two positions reflects the increasing workload of the committee and the utility, particularly in a Covid world, of having a base in both Melbourne and Sydney.

The *FADB* will remain a central part of the Research Committee's activity: the task of identifying potential subjects of entries, commissioning authors and reviewing and editing the drafts, will be an on-going and time-consuming one. The recognition increasingly accorded to the *FADB*, however, demonstrates the value of this project. The quality of the entries was recently acknowledged by Dr Carolyn Rasmussen, historian and biographer and Chair of the Victorian Working Party of the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*. The co-chairs aim to diversify the entries by going beyond the familiar actors in this field to include people who may be little-known but whose lives illuminate the range of French-Australian engagements. The General Editor of the *FADB* is now Alexis Bergantz, but the other members of the Committee also play a role in the various stages of reviewing the drafts and are responsible for the final approval before publication. The submission guidelines have been updated and the review process revised to include peer-review of the entries.

There are a number of ways in which the *FADB* feeds into and benefits from other projects that the Research Committee is undertaking. We have applied for a STAFE grant (*Dispositif de soutien au tissu associatif des Français à l'étranger*)—funding made available by the French government for projects of benefit to overseas French and Francophone communities—to part fund the ‘Wine Project’ coordinated by new Research Committee member Barbara Santich. The research into the notable French and Australian personalities who have contributed to the development of the wine industry here will both furnish material for a publication and a website associated with the project and be a source of additional entries in the *FADB*. This is one of two projects that the Research Committee has agreed to pursue over the next few years, the other being the Walking Tour of Sydney, a geolocalised guide that will take the visitor on a route past the major sites of French presence in the city. Next year we will apply again for funding from STAFE for the Walking Tour of Sydney but we will also seek finance from other sources and begin to gather the material and information needed to progress this project. The Research Committee welcomes donations to a fund that is dedicated to pursuing these and other projects. Information on how to make a donation can be found on the website: isfar.org.au.

It may seem ambitious in these Covid times but one of our aims is to hold regular biennial conferences; the first to be organised by the new committee will be held in Melbourne on 8–9 April 2021. Each conference will focus on a different area of French-Australian relations, while also welcoming papers from all the fields represented by ISFAR. The Symposium in April has a focus on the Indo-Pacific region; a guest speaker, Professor Rory Medcalf, Head of the National Security College, College of Asia & the Pacific at the ANU, will present on that theme. There will also be papers dealing with literature, history and linguistics from the broad field of French-Australian relations. Further information about the Symposium and the Research Committee’s activities can be found on the ISFAR website: isfar.org.au/research.

If the co-chairs have an underlying aim for the Research Committee, it is to develop the focus on past and present French-Australian relations in the Indo-Pacific. This objective will come as no surprise to those who know that each of the co-chairs has a particular interest in this region through their own research, but it is also more than justified by the priority that both

French and Australian governments are now affording it, as demonstrated by the recent intergovernmental agreements and this year's Senate Committee inquiry into Opportunities for Strengthening French-Australian Relations. We are particularly keen to improve links across tertiary sector institutions in the Pacific—to develop the contacts we already have in French territory universities and to add new ones. Some of these colleagues will participate in online sessions of the ISFAR Symposium to be held in April 2021. Alexis Bergantz is working with New Caledonian and Australian colleagues on an exhibition to be held at the new *Musée du bagne* in Noumea, that will provide a forum for further collaboration.

Cognisant of the enormous contribution that Colin Nettelbeck has made over many years to ISFAR, we are working on developing a scholarship in his honour. We close this overview of our perspectives for future activities by once again expressing our appreciation and admiration for his inspired leadership of the Committee over the past decade.

Research Committee members 2021:

Stephen Alomes (RMIT)

Jean Fornasiero (University of Adelaide)

Kerry Mullan (RMIT)

Margaret Sankey (University of Sydney)

Barbara Santich (University of Adelaide)

Co-chairs: Alexis Bergantz (RMIT)

Elizabeth Rechniewski (University of Sydney)

The Committee members' academic biographies and research interests can be found at isfar.org.au/research.