

Oceania Swiss Club Presidents Conference in Sydney

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Oceania Swiss Club Presidents Conference in Sydney

The Oceania Swiss Club Presidents' Conference 2018, organised by the Oceania Delegates of the Council of the Swiss Abroad, coincided with the 50th Anniversary of the Sydney Yodellers and was held at the expansive campus of Riverview College on Sydney Harbour. 38 participants, including five from New Zealand, three Swiss Ambassadors, one Consul General and one Representative of the Foreign Affairs Department in Bern attended. The morning session was reserved for relaying various messages from the Swiss Ambassadors to New Zealand, Pacific and Australia as well as from the Consul General in Sydney. We learned a lot about the Pacific area, which often gets forgotten in the equation as there are few people living on the Pacific Islands, but from an environmental viewpoint the Pacific is enormously important and acts as a lung for the rest of the world. Swiss involvement is mainly on an ecological, scientific level to assess changes in climate and Switzerland works closely together with the Pacific Forum based in Fiji. We also learned that there are about 60 Swiss nationals living in Papua New Guinea, mostly in a missionary function. In Oceania there are just about 35,000 registered Swiss of which about 7,000 are in New Zealand. All Ambassadors stressed historic facts as far as early settlers in both countries are concerned, where Swiss migration played an important role. The various diplomats also stressed the importance official Berne gives to all matters concerning the Swiss Abroad and their efforts to accommodate the demands of the Swiss Abroad in our area and ensure it has been adequately serviced. Australia is the 7th largest country with Swiss migrants, New Zealand 17th. In Oceania Swiss males contribute 54%, females 46% of the diaspora; 20% are over 65 years old.

The afternoon session brought various subjects to the forum such as the perennial fight of the Swiss Abroad with Swiss banks, old age pension payments and resulting tax problems, health insurance and, of course, e-voting. Various speakers urged the Swiss Abroad to sign petitions to the Swiss authorities for enabling e-voting by the year 2021.

Another topic stresses the importance of managing the archives of the Swiss Clubs in Oceania in an orderly way so as to ensure their survival and availability for future research. A publication was prepared to this end by CSA Delegate Roland Isler. Other topics on the agenda,

presented by CSA Delegates Carmen Trochsler and Katja Walliman Gates, were "Good Practice for sharing children's photos online" and the establishment of an "umbrella organisation" for all Swiss Clubs in Australia in a way similar to that already in place in New Zealand, the UK, France, Germany and Italy. The idea and proposal was discussed at length and the advantages of having such an "umbrella organisation" have been highlighted by some Club Presidents. The idea will be discussed further among Swiss Club members and their committees so as to ensure a broad-based approval. An umbrella organisation would guarantee a more unified approach for requests and demands presented in Bern and would also facilitate communications and collaboration in all directions. One of the main benefits of the meeting was certainly the interchange between the Club Presidents from the various areas and it was noted with pleasure that some Swiss Clubs (like Perth and Adelaide) with new and dynamic young Presidents are achieving a positive reversal of membership numbers and who reported a record new membership list. Obviously, well planned and well organised functions are still attractive to all ages.

The meeting concluded with an invitation from the Swiss Clubs in New Zealand to host the meeting of the Oceania Swiss Club Presidents 2020 in Auckland at a time between the end of September and the beginning of November.

The Chairman, Beat Knoblauch, acknowledged the generous sponsorships from the Swiss Community Care Society in Sydney, from the Swiss Club of NSW and donations in kind from the Swiss Consulate General, Lindt Chocolates and printed materials from various sources.

Preceding the conference was a magnificent harbour cruise the night before with over 250 participants, which included Swiss Yodellers from all over Oceania. Swiss music was heard all over Sydney Harbour which presented itself to great advantage in the benevolence of a balmy evening on the water.

The meeting finished with a Gala Dinner at which Yodellers from all over Oceania presented a magnificent show and overseas guests were amazed at the variety of the program and about the Swiss-ness of all the presentations. It was a delight vocally as well as visually.


Beat Knoblauch CSA Delegate Sydney

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