

TelSoc President's Report on behalf of the Board 2023-24

Coverage of this Report

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Introduction

This report is made on behalf of the Board of TelSoc and covers the financial year ending 30 June 2024. However some matters that have arisen or continued in the period since then are also referenced so that the report is fuller than it otherwise might be.

In the 2022-23 report I noted that in various ways TelSoc was an association in transition. This transition is continuing. The issues that are arising are changing, reflecting changes in membership, in Board composition and in the issues that the sector is now concerned with.

Membership

TelSoc is a membership organisation, and its capacity to meet its charter of facilitating public discourse on issues, challenges and developments in the telecommunications sector depends on its having a credible membership base into the future.

As the Treasurer's report indicates, our revenue is largely linked to membership. Being a voluntary, not-for-profit organisation, our interest in revenue is simply to enable us to operate effectively. Maximising revenue for its own sake is not what we are about, so long as we can continue to function as we would wish for the benefit of members.

Our membership has been declining, reflecting what happens when former industry participants retire, die or lose interest. Our efforts to market the benefits of membership to a new generation of prospective members has not yet borne fruit. In 2023-24, and since, the decline that was apparent last year has accelerated. The Board has been concerned to correct this trend and will continue to give attention to developing compelling membership communications directed to both individuals and corporates.

We have not been able, yet, to re-establish regular lunchtime events in Melbourne or Sydney. Prior to COVID, Melbourne in-person events were an important item for TelSoc's membership retention and growth.

Board

At the 2023 AGM, the number of candidates offering their services on the Board was at an all-time high and all ten (10) eligible candidates were accepted and declared elected. TelSoc has a diverse board in terms of skills, gender, age and industry involvement. In addition, Leith Campbell, in his role as Managing Editor of the Journal, is automatically invited to attend the Board and participate in its deliberations. Andrew Hamilton, a member of the Advocacy Sub-Committee of the Board, has attended Board meetings as an invitee.

In August 2023, John Burke, passed away. John had been a member of the Editorial Advisory Board for the Journal for many years, and, from 2017, convened TelSoc's Broadband Futures Group. That Group did much excellent work in advocating for long-term bipartisan policies and strategies to ensure that Australia has the data communications infrastructure and services to support its digital economy and society. John Burke's important contribution will be sorely missed. A tribute to John and his life's work in various fields appeared in the December 2023 issue of the Journal (<https://telsoc.org/journal/jtde-v11-n4/a913>).

I wish to take this opportunity to thank all members of the Board for their dedicated service and valuable contribution to TelSoc during the year.

Events

TelSoc runs two key events each year, the Henry Sutton Oration in Melbourne and the Charles Todd Oration in Sydney.

- Henry Sutton Oration

The Henry Sutton Oration Melbourne lunch has been traditionally run in the first half of the year. We have been pleased to support the Willam Angliss Catering College, a TAFE organisation, over the years and have always received excellent service from the staff and students. The Henry Sutton Oration for 2024, held in May 2024, was no exception.

Our 2024 Henry Sutton Orator was Emilio Romeo, CEO and Managing Director of Ericsson Australia and New Zealand. Emilio gave an excellent speech which focussed on the long involvement of Ericsson in Australian telecommunications, pre-dating federation to the present, and recent developments within Ericsson. Emilio also covered the business case, developments and current uses of 5G and the potential for further exploitation of its capabilities.

- Charles Todd Oration

I referred in my report to the AGM in 2023 to the presentation by Rob Nicholls, from the UNSW Business School, at the Charles Todd Oration and lunch held in Sydney at the Royal Automobile Club of Australia on 12 October 2023.

Rob was introduced by the Minister, Michelle Rowland MP. He gave an excellent speech on the development of regulation from the time of the colonial administrations to the present day, and focussed on the adequacy of current regulatory tools to address the regulatory needs associated with very different markets and technologies, such as Artificial Intelligence. The speech has been printed in the December 2023 issue of the Journal (<https://telsoc.org/journal/jtde-v11-n4/a856>).

Although the 2024 Charles Todd Oration, held on 17 October 2024, falls outside the financial year covered by this report, I mention it for completeness. Our speaker for 2024 was Will Irving, the Chief of Strategy and Transformation at NBN Co who gave an excellent speech entitled *If at first you don't succeed...* covering the circumstances and insights into the creation of NBN Co and observations about the future of the industry, including the future of universal service in Australia. It is expected that the speech will be published in the December 2024 issue of the Journal.

- Other events

TelSoc was not able, for various reasons, to hold the number and frequency of other events, especially online presentations, that it planned to do at the time of the 2023 AGM. Some planned events were put on hold because the speakers required release of reports to the Government, or other clearances that were not forthcoming.

The following events that were held during the year:

- Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman and Developing Consumer Regulation (21 September 2023, online event)
- Understanding Transversal Issues within Specialty Engineering (25 October 2023, Engineering Australia online event with TelSoc access)
- The Continuing Need for Digital Infrastructure and Resources in the Creative Industries (21 November 2023, online event)
- The Need for Differentiation and Prioritisation of Customer Experience for Telstra Broadband (26 March 2024, online event)
- NBN Co: Transforming Australia through Fibre (21 May 2024, online event)
- Vocus and Low Earth Orbit Satellites (18 June 2024, Engineering Australia online event with TelSoc access)

Journal of Telecommunications and the Digital Economy

The Managing Editor of the Journal, Leith Campbell, has overseen the publication of four quarterly issues during the year, each of high standard and substantial interest. A separate report on the Journal has been provided to members for the AGM by the Managing Editor.

Leith Campbell is standing down from the position of Managing Editor at the end of 2024, and the Board has appointed Dr Michael de Percy, Vice President of TelSoc and an existing Section Editor for the Journal, to take over the role from January 2025.

On behalf of the Board and members, I wish to recognise the outstanding contribution that Leith Campbell has made to TelSoc and to the Journal over many years, both during his time as Managing Editor and for many years before that, and to express our sincere thanks. In addition the voluntary and substantial contributions of all associated with the Journal are deeply appreciated. The Journal is key to TelSoc's role and it is important that it continue to be a major means of sharing knowledge and engaging in public discourse on sector issues and topics.

We wish Michael de Percy great success in 2025 and beyond. I am sure that the Board and all members will be available to assist him as needed with the Journal.

Policy Development and Engagement

I reported to the 2023 AGM that TelSoc's primary agenda item in relation to policy development is relatively simple – namely, that there is a national digital communications plan that is long-term, potentially bipartisan, and which delivers the continuity of purpose and commitment that will encourage investment and development of the sector, and also promote digital inclusion. In 2023 the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts (the Department) established a 2035 Telecom Plan Team to scope this idea further, and has embarked on a series of low-key consultations to that end. TelSoc has participated in the forums and directly with the 2035 Plan Team. The work of the Team is ongoing, and TelSoc has effective contact arrangements.

Finally, I want to acknowledge the work of the Board and all of our active and interested members during the year. We are a voluntary organisation and can only continue to make a contribution through continued effort of our members as volunteers.

Jim Holmes
President, TelSoc
October 2024