

The Australian Meteorological Society (Inc)

20th February, 1969 – 19th August, 2023

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Part 1. History

This brief history is compiled from reports of successive presidents as presented to AGMs, from examination of *Monana* in its journal form from August 1969 to November 1995, and from its newsletter form thereafter, where they exist. Beyond that, it is from recollection of members.

This author was a member from the inauguration of the society to its end.

How did it begin?

The single and most important factor in bringing the AMetA into existence was John (Doc) Hogan, the head of the then Adelaide Weather Bureau. (I think that all the regional supremos in the Commonwealth Bureau of Meteorology were called “Deputy Director” at the time he was appointed in 1953.

Late in 1967, he sent letters to various newspapers and radio stations explaining his proposal to form what would later become the Australian Meteorological Association, and inviting responses from people who would be interested in forming such an association.

What was his motivation for doing this?

He explained it in his inaugural address at the first meeting, putting it into print. In brief:

There were associations in SA for people interested in many other branches of science, but none for Meteorology.

- There are probably more people interested in the weather than in any other branch of science. Consciously or subconsciously everyone is a forecaster when deciding what to wear each morning.
- From the evidence of hundreds of enquiries that the Bureau was getting each year, not just for forecasts and data, but also for explanations of phenomena, it seemed that there was a clear need for an association of people interested in meteorology, not necessarily with academic qualifications, where they could get together and discuss these matters.
- There were hundreds of people already making their own observations and recordings, using anything from simple rain gauges to more elaborate stations.
- These latter enthusiasts range in age from young people at school where they may be encountering aspects of meteorology in the curriculum, to people in their 80s or beyond.
- There is a whole range of areas that weather and climate impact on and *vice versa*.

There is no doubt that that he was an enthusiast in his job, and recognised that there were a lot of other enthusiasts in the community. He was reported in *The Advertiser* to have said that during one heat wave the Bureau got about 2700 phone calls in a day, and still had to get the forecast out on time. (Trove: Nearly 6 calls a minute in an 8-hour day: surely a misprint or exaggeration?)

One could guess that he wanted to educate the public. In 1954, according to newspaper reports, many people blamed the Bureau for the earthquake! Also, since the atomic bomb tests starting in the 1950s, some people would “blame the bomb” for anything extreme, like hot spells, or cold spells,

or too much rain, or drought, and Hogan would explain that the average cyclone had 100,000 times more energy than the Hiroshima bomb.

One could speculate that he may have seen such an association, sponsored as it has been, albeit unofficially, by Bureau personnel, as a sort of public outreach or PR arm of the Bureau. This view certainly was shared by most of his successors, who later, like him, became presidents of the association. In those times, he maintained a presence in the newspapers. The media were happy to oblige. He saw it as good politics for the Bureau and for Meteorology to keep weather in the public eye.

He was supported by Dr W.J.Gibbs, Director-General of the Bureau, and of Mr R.Kingsland, Head of the Commonwealth Department of the Interior, of which the Bureau was part.

He received a good response and invited 15 people from various occupations to a meeting in the Bureau on West Terrace to form a steering committee to devise a constitution, and to arrange a launch.

He also quickly moved to register the name before anyone else (presumably interstate) could claim it. Many years later, in October, 1976, AmetA became an Incorporated Society.

Just as an aside, Peter Adamson in his talk to the Association in June 2004 on Clement Wragge, who was in Adelaide from 1884 to 1887 (in Charles Todd's time) mentioned that Wragge was "instrumental in setting up the Meteorological Society of Australasia". From a quick search on "Trove", it appears that it was founded in May 1886, and the last reported Adelaide meeting was in December 1887. At that time, Wragge had moved to Brisbane and sent examples of his daily maps to Adelaide for that meeting, according to the report. He then moved the HQ of the society to Brisbane. The first reported meeting there was in December 1888, and the last reported in January 1889.

Regarding other Meteorological societies, it is relevant to mention two. According to Wikipedia, the Australian Meteorological and Oceanographic Society (AMOS) came onto the scene in 1987. Also according to Wikipedia, it is the successor to the Australian branch of The Royal Meteorological Society, which lasted for about 15 years, and so must have been established in about 1972.

In fact, AmetA was invited to join the Australian Branch of The Royal Meteorological Society in August, 1979. The pros and cons were debated, but the offer was declined for several reasons, not the least being the cost to the Society. Several AMetA members were already members (Fellows) of the Royal Meteorological Society.

The First Meeting

The first meeting was held in the Police Auditorium in Angas Street on February 20, 1969 (**not** 1971 as in Gene Vecchio's paper, *The Adelaide Observatory and 140 Years of Observations at West terrace*). See below. List of Meetings, (1969 – 2023)

It was huge! 280 people attended. Doc Hogan gave the address inaugurating the Association. Then Dr W.J.Gibbs, whom he had got over from Melbourne gave an address on *The History, in brief, of Meteorology in Australia*. In addition, a just-released Australian documentary film was shown, entitled "*Is Anyone Doing Anything About It*", a reference to a quotation commonly attributed to Mark Twain, but more correctly originating from Charles Dudley Warner, "Politics makes strange bedfellows, everyone talks about the weather...is anybody doing anything about it...?". Interestingly enough, the answer was that railway telegraphers across America were reporting on it, just like

Todd's Overland Telegraph telegraphers were doing here. (Reported in the 1899 journal, *Transcommunicator*, Vol 16, apparently.)

The membership included some South Australian country members, as well as a small number from interstate, as well as metropolitan enthusiasts. In due course, all members would receive the association journal *Monana*, which would contain reports of the meetings. The first issue appeared in August, 1969.

The Second Meeting

Nearly two months later, on April 10, 1969, the first AGM was held, at Adelaide University, attended by 105 people. There were three short talks; John Hogan on *A Discussion of Two Interesting Meteorological Situations*, Lyn Mitchell on *A General Rain Situation over SA, February 1969*, and M.Williams on *A Stationary Low near Mt Gambier from 1/2/69 to 4/2/69*. It is interesting to note that right from the outset, there was some discussion of current or recent weather formally or informally at most meetings. In later years nearly every meeting started with a summary of the immediate past situation.

The main business of the meeting was formally to adopt the constitution, and to confirm the foundation committee, whose membership was as follows:

President	J.Hogan	Bureau of Meteorology
Vice-President	B.Mason	Dept.of Geography, University of Adelaide
Secretary	L.Mitchell	Bureau of Meteorology
Treasurer	M.Moncrieff	Bureau of Meteorology
Committee	R.Culver	Dept. of Civil Engineering, University of Adelaide
	R.Calversbert	Police Inspector
	K.Cook	Commercial Photographer
	A.Welbourn	Architect
	W.Slaytor	Dept. of Geography, Adelaide Teachers College

The Third Meeting

This was held in the hall of the Master Builders' Association on June 12 1969, with an attendance of 105 persons. There were two addresses: by Bruce Mason on *Pressure and Wind*, and by John Hogan on *The Aneroid Barometer: How to use it to make your own forecasts*.

The proceedings of the first three meetings were reported in the first number of *Monana*. In which the foreword was written by Mr R. Kingsland CBE,DFC, a former Meteorologist but at that time Head of the Commonwealth department of the Interior, of which the Bureau was part.

Frequency of Meetings

Until about the end of 1982, and again from the beginning of 1986, the Association continued to meet in February, April, June, August and October, as a rule, depending on the availability of good speakers on topics of likely interest to members. Occasionally, an extra meeting might occur to take advantage of a visiting speaker.

Up to the mid-1970s, although the membership was around the 100 plus mark, regular attendance at meetings had fallen to around 50 on average.

Meeting Venues

Until the end of 1975, with the exception of the first two meetings, they were held in the hall of the Master Builders Association, South Terrace, Adelaide, except for a period from February, 1971 to February, 1972, when they were held at the Museum. From February, 1976 to February, 1977, meetings were held at The Australian Minerals Foundation at Glenside.

Thereafter, with some exceptions, notably including visits to the Airport Weather facility, ADS Channel 17 studios with weather presenter Keith Martyn, and the Annual Dinner meetings after they became a feature, from April, 1977 to August 2015, all meetings occurred in the Conference Room at the Bureau in Kent Town. This proved a very suitable and popular venue for the smaller attendance and also provided facilities for a cup of coffee and opportunity for informal discussion after the meeting. Committee meetings were nearly always held before the main meeting.

When the Bureau vacated the Kent Town site, in 2015, it made available to AmetA the conference room of its new premises on the third floor of Optus House on the corner of King William Street and South Terrace. The first meeting there was on 20 October, 2015

With the onset of Covid in 2020, there was a cessation of meetings until 2021, and when they resumed, they were held in St. Saviour's Church Hall at Glen Osmond.

As regards meetings at different venues, these have included joint meetings with other associations, notably with AMOS, the Australian Meteorological and Oceanographic Society, occasional joint meetings with other groups at the Royal Institution in the city, the Royal Society/SA Museum/Mawson Institute precinct, the Flinders University Campus on Victoria Square in Adelaide, and with the Hydrological Society at the Waite Campus of the University of Adelaide.

One exceptional meeting occurred in August 1997, when the talk was on Global Warming and was given by a visiting American Meteorologist, a prominent sceptic and denier. Scepticism was more common then than it is now. Correctly anticipating a larger attendance than usual, the committee fortunately booked a larger hall, the Mullins Gallery at Beulah Park.

From time to time there was only standing room at the back of the conference room at Kent Town if the topic was of wider interest than just to meteorology freaks. A good example was the talk on the Southern Ocean search for the capsized yachtsman Bullimore in the single-handed round the world yacht race in 1997.

The Period 1983 to 1986

From 1983 to 1986, the Association went into recess. The membership "on the books" for most of the 1970s was around 100, but in the latter part of the decade and the early 1980s, attendance at meetings had dwindled to around 20 or 30, including the committee. It seemed impossible to get volunteers for committee positions, hence the same people being "recycled". Possible reasons for declining attendance include that our traditional methods of publicising meetings in the media were no longer working. Our friendly journalists had moved on and their replacements weren't interested. In retrospect, one can see that the committee members hadn't a clue about marketing. Also in retrospect, most of the committee members were in mid-career and had other priorities. For

whatever reasons, the Association went into a three-year hiatus, although the committee members kept in touch to a certain extent.

In mid-1986, the committee decided to try to reactivate, and a General Meeting was called on August 26, 1986 to do so. Fortunately, there was a reasonable response and it was decided to continue.

In the next two years two more numbers of the traditional *Monana* were produced, with full articles or reports of meetings, but thereafter, due to the difficulty of getting speakers to prepare their talks for publication, it was decided to cease *Monana* in this form, and to replace it with the Newsletter containing brief summaries of the talks, available in either hard copy or electronic form. The Newsletter already existed and contained a notice for the next meeting, together with a climatic summary, with notable weather events, of the previous period. The almost universal use of "Powerpoint" has made this inevitable. Our speakers are volunteers and it is an imposition on their time to ask them to write up their talks.

With the appearance of Covid, and another short hiatus in 2020-2021, in the *Monana/Newsletter* there was a widening in scope to include notes from the president, other news of meteorologically-related interest, and short articles from members.

Four Developments in the 21st Century

These developments occurred concurrently after different starting dates.

Firstly, was the development of the website on the Internet. Initially this was devised largely by Terry Keen, but responsibility after his death passed to Bruce Davis, Dave Brown and Mark Little.

Then in 2009 the AmetA incorporated into its structure the volunteers group which had evolved, and whose members spent their free time researching the history of various aspects of the Bureau and its work. This is one of the more significant things that has happened to the Association in recent years, and has been of mutual benefit. Under the leadership and main authorship of Tony Rogers, five books have been published by AmetA in association with the Bureau. Prior to the amalgamation with AmetA, the volunteers produced *Floods in South Australia: 1836 to 2005*, and *Weather Prophets of South Australia*. After the amalgamation, came *South Australia's Extreme Weather: Its Human Impact (2009)*, *Weather and the Science of Settlement (2011)*, and *The Weatherman from Greenwich: Charles Todd – 1826 to 1910* by Tony Rogers and Judy Ferrante, (2017).

The third, and potentially highly significant, development is under the leadership of Mac Benoy involving volunteers in a truly monumental Citizen Science project to digitise the complete 31 years weather records and charts of Charles Todd starting in 1877, together with the post-Todd records. These data, apart from contributing to the National Digital Heritage Collection of the National Archives of Australia are also being used by NOAA in Washington in computer modelling directed towards the recreation of synoptic charts going back 175 years or so.

The fourth development is under the leadership of the final President, Mark Little. It is the formation of a Personal Weather Station Group (PWS). Although several members or affiliates of AmetA are involved, sadly it has come too late in the life of the Association.

With the Association now non-existent, some of these developments will likely continue, but under different auspices.

Personalities

As in many societies, successive Presidents were usually the preceding Vice Presidents. Nearly all were SA Regional directors or had some professional association with the BoM. Also, on relinquishing an Office on the committee, most made themselves available for re-election to another position. Occasionally, the Secretary was also the Treasurer. Considering the 54 years history of the society, with this recycling, there have been relatively few people involved in its management. The names listed are in roughly chronological order of election to the position.

Successive Presidents and Vice Presidents

John Hogan (Founding President) BoM

Alan Brunt (BoM)

Lyn Mitchell (BoM)

John Noye (Mathematician, Oceanographer)

Graeme Furler (BoM)

Beth Walton (BoM)

Beth Walton/Warwick Grace (ex BoM) (Joint)

Mark Little (Ex BoM)

Successive Secretaries/Treasurers

Lyn Mitchell/Morrie Moncrieff

Joan Bannister

Peter Webb

John Armstrong

Gene Vecchio

Bruce Brooks

John Pethic

Beth Walton

Darren Ray/John Braendler

Beth Walton/ John Lethbridge

People who have served on the Committee

All of the above, plus in the 1960s, Bruce Mason, R Culver, R Calversbert, K Cook, Bill Slaytor, Mary Whitehead, Mrs I Mills, A Welbourne, Terry Keen, and Warren Wright.

In the 1985-90s, Gene Vecchio, Adrian Gordon. In the 2010-20s, Bruce Davis, Mac Benoy, Dave Brown, Gary Goland, Graham Boyce.

Editors and producers of "Monana"

In the "journal" form: Terry Keen, Warren Wright, Bill Slaytor. In the Newsletter form: Darren Ray, Dianne and Bruce Davis.

Honorary Life Members

Lyn Mitchell, Adrian Gordon, Mick Olsen, Graeme Furler, Terry Keen, Bill Slaytor, Warren Wright, Beth Walton

Epilogue

The Winding-up of the AMetA

The discourse so far has been mostly factual and objective. Now it will become, speculative and subjective.

In the late 2010s, but particularly after the appearance of Covid, it became increasingly obvious that it was becoming difficult to get nominations for positions on the committee. This was especially true for the executive positions. Most had served on the committee for many years. Some were ageing, and needing time and energy to pursue other interests. Some had got used to staying at home and becoming reluctant to go out at night to meetings. Curiously, the attendance at some meetings of an interdisciplinary nature, for example, bushfires, was in the 30s, but did not result in any recruitment to membership.

The reasons that John Hogan put forward for the need for the Association probably remain, but those informational needs are being satisfied in easier ways “in spades” by Internet media, especially by the superlative BoM website.

But one thing that the internet doesn’t do well, if at all, is to cater for the social aspect and needs that some people have to discuss “face to face” matters of interest. For this reason, it is likely that the volunteers’ group and possibly the PWS group will continue without the AmetA.

Perhaps inevitably then, at a Special General Meeting of the AmetA on the 7th March, 2023, a motion was passed to wind-up the Association at a final luncheon meeting on the 19th August, 2023.

Thus ends 54 years of The Australian Meteorological Society (Incorporated).

Sic Transit Gloria Mundi

Part 2. List of Meetings

See Part 2, List of Meetings, in Tabular, Landscape mode