

REVIEW OF THE PREMIER'S LITERARY AWARDS AND HISTORY AWARDS 22 November 2011

The Review Panel of the NSW Premier's Literary Awards and History Awards met on 20 October 2011, 10 November 2011 and 16 November 2011. All five panel members attended all three meetings.

The Review Panel considered the objectives set out in the Terms of Reference and gave specific attention to the conduct of the Awards. Panel members decided that minority opinions should be stated where there was no uniformity of view on a particular matter.

The Review Panel's recommendations are stated below.

• Presentation Functions for Literary Awards and History Awards

Two functions should continue to be held – one for the Literary Awards and one for the History Awards.

Each function should be held in the Legislative Assembly in the presence of the Premier, who will hand out the awards. A guest speaker will be invited for the Literary Awards and History Awards and should be paid an honorarium. Invitations to address the functions should be extended by the Premier or the Premier's Office.

The functions should commence at 6 pm with the guest speaker talking for around 15 minutes but no more than 20 minutes. Each Award function should conclude no later than 7.15 pm.

The Review panel was divided on the speaking role of the prize winners. A majority considered that speeches by Award winners should be limited to two minutes and confined to the Book of the Year, Kenneth Slessor, Christina Stead, Douglas Stewart, Ethel Turner and Patricia Wrightson prize winners.

Peter Coleman and Gerard Henderson expressed a minority opinion that all prize winners should be invited to speak but that a two minute time limit should be rigorously enforced with respect to all prize winners.

The Panel was of the view that dinners which have accompanied the Literary and History Awards in recent years should be abolished and that they should be replaced by receptions in Parliament House – preferably in the Strangers' Dining Room. The replacement of expensive dinners by more modest receptions would free up significant funds to be allocated elsewhere within the budget of the Literary and History Awards. In addition, the dinner has been time-consuming for organisers. It is understood that, in the early years of the Premier's Awards, receptions were held rather than dinners.

Admission to the receptions should be complimentary for award winners, judges and administrators. However, others would pay a designated sum to cover costs per head – this would be significantly less than the payment for a dinner.

▪ ***Selection of Judges***

The Review Panel recommends that the existing structure be replaced by a system in which there is a senior judge in three major areas – i.e. Fiction and Non-Fiction in relation to the Literary Awards and History.

Senior judges should be remunerated in the range of \$12,000 to \$15,000 and other judges who will serve on the various panels, should receive a payment of \$2,500. Expressions of interest should be invited for the senior judge and judges' positions in all three categories. However, the committee appointing judges could invite a person or persons to apply.

The Review Panel recommended that the selection panel for the appointment of judges should comprise Gerard Henderson (as chair), Mary Darwell (representing Arts NSW) and Michael Sexton.

The Review Panel was of the view that the most appropriate way to re-invigorate the NSW Premier's Literary and History Awards was to ensure that judges should be of the highest possible ability in order to recognise that Australia's best writers are rewarded and the reputation of NSW is enhanced as a vibrant, creative and leading intellectual environment.

▪ ***Submission of Entries***

The Panel is of the view that the existing situation should continue – in that entries can be made by publishers or authors. However, the entrance fee should be increased to \$100 for each entry. The aim of this recommendation change is to ensure that only the best books are entered for prizes – so that judges will have more time to focus on likely winners.

▪ ***Existing Categories***

Literary Awards

The Review Panel favours the retention of current categories – with a couple of qualifications. It does not favour the creation of any new awards.

The Review Panel recommends the abolition of the recently established People's Choice Award. This has no monetary award but is expensive to administer. Also the Award has not ignited much interest within the general community.

The Review Panel recommends the deletion of the Premier's Prize for Literary Scholarship since this duplicates other categories.

The Review Panel recommends that the Special Award should become occasional rather than annual. The Panel held the view that the special circumstances involved do not necessarily occur annually. The granting of this award on an occasional basis should enhance its standing.

Savings made from the abandonment or reduction of awards should be ploughed back to provide adequate remuneration for judges and, if possible, an increase in prize monies.

History Awards

The Review Panel recommends that the Premier's History Awards remains as in 2011 with one exception. The General History Prize should be awarded to a book of national or international significance. The Review Panel noted that one of the five awards is for a book relating to NSW and that all of the other awards might also be for such a work.

▪ *Standards for Awards*

The Review Panel decided not to recommend any formal judging process. Decisions are best made by a form of consensus following a judgement of a work's originality, structure, research, factual accuracy and use of the English language.

Ida Lichter expressed a minority opinion that judging should be done with reference to a point-scoring system to be determined by the judges, at least to the stage of shortlisted entries.

The Review Panel recommended that judges be required to assess entries with regard to both their own opinions and also with respect to how works have been assessed by reviewers, critics, commentators etc.

The Review Panel believes that judges need to declare any possible conflicts of interest with respect to entries. It will, of course, often be the case that some or all of the judges will be acquainted with various publishers and authors but any involvement in bringing a book to publication or a particularly close family or personal relationship with an author should obviously disqualify a judge from consideration of an award for which the relevant book is a contender.

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Gerard Henderson (Chair)
Peter Coleman
Shelley Gare
Ida Lichter
Michael Sexton

22 November 2011