

From the President

On Monday 13 September, the new building works were opened. Two replacement lifts, a new stair-free entry from Bathurst Street and a new lift to enable people with mobility disabilities to move from street level to ground floor level were significant improvements, as were two new vocational training classrooms. The needs of people who cannot use the entry stairs had formerly been met by offering them supervised access through the car park door. This system did not always work satisfactorily, because such people sometimes arrived unexpectedly or wanted to leave early when no one was available to assist them. They can now enter or leave the building through the front door without having to ask for assistance. It gave me particular satisfaction that this has at last been achieved. Despite my advocacy for improved accessibility when the ground floor area was renovated about ten years ago, other priorities took precedence then.

The Great Depression that lasted a decade from 1929 shaped a generation of Australians. The misery of mass unemployment and widespread evictions are beyond the experience of many alive today. Fortunately, economists study Depression history closely and have analysed what governments would need to do to prevent the slide into economic chaos if ever a global financial crisis struck again. During the early stages of the Great Depression, governments cut expenditures to balance the books as tax receipts declined, deepening the crisis. During the Global Financial Crisis following the bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers in September 2008, governments around the world instead of tightening their belts provided economic stimulus spending to keep economies afloat. Speaking at the opening of the new building works, I acknowledged those who had suffered during the Great Depression. WEA Sydney was not merely the lucky recipient of several hundred thousand dollars of funding for renovations. Australian Government funding for our building works was part of a well-conceived plan that saved each of us from a significant risk that we might have experienced first-hand what people around the world experienced during the 1930s.

In 2010 we lost several valued WEA colleagues, including general assistant Sam Moraitis, who was always a helpful presence around the building. WEA Sydney Film Society prepared to celebrate its 50th anniversary in February 2011, but its long-time secretary Doug Roberts passed away in October and its long-time president Tom Politis in December. We miss them.

Economic commentators now suggest that more of us are saving rather than spending, reducing debt rather than splashing out. This is a challenge even for WEA Sydney. Fortunately WEA's short courses in liberal and general studies attract a loyal following, and competitors cannot match our range. But the challenge for our educational managers and tutors is far more daunting than getting back to 15,000 or 16,000 enrolments. We must continue to offer each student a satisfying educational experience in each of several hundred courses that are offered seven days a week, in small classes that offer excellent opportunities for active discussion and learning.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Leth Maitland'. The signature is stylized with a long, sweeping underline.

Leth Maitland
President