

# CHAIRPERSON'S ANNUAL REPORT 2025

Our Purpose: to define, record and promote migration heritage in the Illawarra



I am truly pleased to present our annual report for 2025. This year has witnessed a great leap forward towards the establishment of a large museum for our region. The work that has been undertaken to develop a prospectus for the Museum of People, Country and Industry in Port Kembla is a real highlight of 2025.

## **VIETNAMESE COMMUNITY PHOTOGRAPHIC EXHIBITION WITH WCC LIBRARY Commemorating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Fall of Saigon**

This exhibition was a partnership between Wollongong City Library, the Vietnamese Community and the Migration Heritage Project.

The exhibition and the commemorative events took place in June 2025. Teresa Tran, the president of the Vietnamese Community in Wollongong led the project team to produce a moving and informative exhibition at the WCC Library. The exhibition was opened by Cr Tania Brown the Lord Mayor of Wollongong, with speeches by Ian Birch from the Vietnam Veterans Association (Wollongong, Port Kembla and Dapto RSLs), Carol Berry MP, Member for Whitlam, Mrs Quan Tran from the Indo Chinese Aged Group and Franca Facci from the Migration Heritage Project.

All provided insights and reflections, not only on the tragic and gruelling personal journeys of escaping Vietnam, but also of the great contributions that the Vietnamese communities have made to Wollongong and Australia.

The stories of our Vietnamese neighbours and friends as they experienced the events leading up to and after the fall of Saigon in 1975, need to be remembered and recorded in permanent places so we can learn from our history and understand the decisions made at the time. Equally the stories and experiences of our defence personnel who went into the war and were greatly impacted not only by the war but by the reception on their return home.

These stories are not comprehensively documented in our region and unless we take action now, they will be lost to future generations.

## **FAIRY MEADOW SURF LIFE SAVING CLUB 75TH ANNIVERSARY DOCUMENTARY**

The Fairy Meadow Surf Life Saving Club celebrated its 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in 2025 and a volunteer at the Club offered to put together a video of the club's history. Given its proximity to the former Balgownie/Fairy Meadow Migrant Hostel, the Surf Club contacted MHP to enquire if the MHP had any information about Ugo Franco, a young Italian migrant who drowned in August 1952 at Fairy Meadow Beach whilst helping to save two British migrants in trouble in the surf. While the MHP did not have any detailed information about Ugo Franco, we did have a member who had a family connection to this incident and as a result was able to contribute more background information to the story. This drowning incident was one of the key factors that helped to enhance the Surf Life Saving Club all those years ago.

The video produced by the club also featured an interview with MP Dai Le, federal member for Fowler, councillor for Fairfield/Cabravale Ward at City of Fairfield. Dai Le lived at Fairy Meadow Hostel after arriving from Vietnam and the transcript of the interview will be on the MHP website.

### **MUSEUM OF PEOPLE, COUNTRY AND INDUSTRY - MPC**

The progress towards realising a large, dynamic and contemporary museum that tells the stories of us, has been steady and incredibly positive in the last 12 months.

As I indicated last year, a small team of infrastructure professionals offered their services to us on a pro bono basis to help articulate a compelling argument for the need and value of a museum in the region.

The result was the five foundational pillars;

- First Australians
- Migrant heritage
- Social heritage
- Industrial heritage and;
- Natural Abundance.

Most significantly, in 2025, as a result of consultations with key Elders of our Illawarra Indigenous communities, we added 'Country' to the name of our museum. It is now the MUSEUM OF PEOPLE, COUNTRY AND INDUSTRY (MPCI). This museum will tell the intersecting stories of who we are, what we do and where we live.

MPCI will be a contemporary museum using a wide range of modalities to tell our stories. We will use the best of technology and our work will be underpinned by the rigour of museum practices. Contemporary museums are no longer passive offerings. The MPC be a place of gathering, of interaction, of debate, of reflection and of engagement with our neighbours. It will be a contemporary repository of inspiration that encourages interaction, workshops and experiential activities that enhance and extend the content on display.

The museum will require significant funding and we are hoping to attract a mix of philanthropy, social benefit levies, revenue raising opportunities and government grants to ensure we create a dynamic destination. We also intend that it will a multipurpose space able to accommodate concerts and art exhibitions, small conferences and extend outdoors for ceremony and to view large installations and machinery that are of significance to our history.

Working on the MPC proposal has and will continue to take significant time and energy and will be transformational for the MHP. The MPC is a formal subcommittee of the MHP and has been integrated into the MHP meetings so we will forge ahead with a single vision.

### **PROMOTIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES**

As a result of socialising the MPC, we have had numerous news articles in print, radio and free to air television reporting on the proposal for the MPC and understanding the benefits to the region. A formal Public Information Session was held on the 8 October 2025 to showcase the vision of the MPC and to rally enthusiasm and support for its progress. Over 50 people attended and the session was well received.

## **ONGOING RESEARCH**

After reaching the milestone of publishing 30 stories of individuals on our website, the story of Emilio Fogliati, the man who sold some of his land for the construction of the Fraternity Club in Fairy Meadow was added to the site.

Fidelia Pontarolo also gave an impressive presentation on Emilio Fogliati's life and legacy at the AGM in 2024 receiving very positive feedback from the audience. The MHP then catalogued the research material for the Fogliati family for safe keeping.

## **ADVOCACY**

MHP/MPCI contributed to the Wollongong City Council's local strategic planning statement 2025-2045 which resulted in some positive additions and amendments to the plan helping to bolster the attention needed for the heritage and cultural sector.

We also made a significant submission to support BlueScope's application to re zone 200 hectares of non-operational land next to the Port Kembla Steelworks to a Special Enterprise Zone (SP4). The re-zoning is absolutely critical to enable the use of the land deemed surplus to use for steelmaking, for other purposes. Without a change in zoning, we could not move ahead with the proposal for a museum in that location.

## **IN CONCLUSION - THANK YOU!**

Thank you from the bottom of our hearts for supporting the Migration Heritage Project, the MPCI and our initiatives! As supporters of the MHP you will be happy to know that you are doing so much more than supporting groups of volunteers to work on curious and interesting facts about our history. The work of the heritage sector is valuable in many ways, however, when questions of economic value are raised, often the value that is generated by the heritage and arts sectors is overlooked. The arts and heritage sectors support initiatives that enhance health and wellbeing, build community capacity and cohesion as well as build the cultural and economic strength of communities.

We are not the only ones who believe this. Let me share some work carried out by A New Approach (ANA). ANA is Australia's arts and culture think tank. They work to create an arts and culture system that delivers for all people and communities. ANA is independent, evidence-led and non-partisan.

Ms Kate Fielding is the CEO and she states; "Our research over recent years has repeatedly demonstrated that culture and creativity is a proven method for connecting communities, supporting democracy and strengthening economies and that purposeful policy action and industry effort is needed for it to thrive in cities, suburbs and towns.

"Culture and creativity can help Australia to become a cohesive and prosperous nation but we're still letting too many Australians down. At home, people can't access cultural and creative experiences and abroad we're not making the most of our diverse creative strengths and our maturing cultural confidence. "Sticking with the status quo is a lost opportunity. Let's act now to improve equitable access to experiences, create even stronger policy, regulatory and investment environments, and build on our shared cultural inheritance." (30 July 2025)

For these reasons, we really appreciate the support that you provide us and encourage you to value the wider contribution you are making to the community through your membership of the MHP and MPCI. You can feel very virtuous in your support of us!

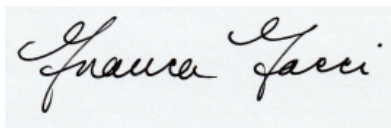
To everyone who contributes to the MHP and MPCl, thank you so very much for your drive and commitment to ensuring that we stay relevant and visible in the community. Without your input and energy we would not be able to achieve everything that we do.

I wish to pay particular thanks to Fidelia Pontarolo as Secretary who works incredibly hard to ensure every cog in our organisation keeps turning. Fidelia doesn't like the spotlight but deserves to have a special mention. Special thanks also to Gregor Cullen who produces our visuals and branding, you make our stories sing! To the other MHP committee members who come to meetings each month, Zofia, Darinka, Loan, without your commitment we wouldn't still be here. Thanks to long standing member Andrew Krajewski from the Polish Museum who reluctantly resigned this year. And... heartfelt thanks to the new members who have joined us to build the MPCl vision.

Thanks also to Gwyn Tavener-Smith for preparing the financial report and assisting the committee with fiscal compliance.

Wishing you all the very best for a pleasing close to 2025 and a joyful beginning to 2026.

Kind regards



Chairperson  
Migration Heritage Project  
Convenor  
Museum of People, Country and Industry