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Linux Australia President's Report for 2015

By Joshua Hesketh

Executive summary

Linux Australia continues to be the peak body for Open Source communities in Australia with a strong year. 2015 saw seven open source conferences run within Australia and New Zealand by volunteers under the auspices of LA. This sustained strength in local events is a testament to the dedication and hard work of our collective and expanding community.

During the year the organisation had to deal with an unfortunate breach of their servers. Thankfully the damage was limited and no personal data is believed to be compromised[0]. Full details were released to the members as soon as it was practical and the overall handling and disclosure of the incident was widely praised. A second potential leak of information later in the year highlighted the need for more volunteer help and efforts in keeping our systems up to date and our data secure[1].

After the financial loss from the previous year, the organisation has managed to return a healthy profit and strengthen its overall position allowing itself to be self insuring against conference losses. This is thanks to the hard work of all the events and volunteers throughout the year.

While a 2016 budget is still being drafted it is the hope of the outgoing council that some of the extra funds will be put into the grants and sponsorship account allowing the organisation to create stronger roots in allied organisations such as the Software Freedom Conservancy and the Electronics Frontiers Australia.

The organisation is at a bit of a crossroads while it looks towards the future. I believe protecting our values[2] in an online-first world will become increasingly important. Software as a service poses significant challenges to open source, open data and privacy. I hope to spend a bit of time thinking about ways in which we can address some of these challenges both as Linux Australia and as an open community.

Kathy Reid kicked off a great inflection point on Linux Australia's strategic direction, proposing some challenges, options and solutions[3]. Anthony Towns also weighed in with some very pragmatic thoughts that were well received by the members[4]. These discussions are ongoing and anybody interested in weighing in (or even better, volunteering) is encouraged to do so on the linux-aus[5] mailing list (which also contains the relevant archives).

As many are likely aware, I decided early on in the year that this term would be my last. I have been on the council for 6 years now (and involved with LA for even longer) and I think it's time for some fresh blood, so to speak. I can not give enough thanks to all of the members and fellow councillors for their support and hard work during this time. I look forward to welcoming in the new council and wish them all the best.

Events and Conferences

During 2015 there were 7 conferences/events ran as part of Linux Australia.

- LCA2015
- DrupalSouth 2015
- PyConAU 2015
- OSDC 2015
- GovHack 2015
- JoomlaDay Brisbane 2015
- WordCamp Brisbane 2015

The upcoming events currently being organised as part of Linux Australia:

- LCA2016
- PyCon AU 2016
- WordCamp Sunshine Coast 2016
- DrupalSouth 2016
- DrupalGov 2016
- LCA2017
- LCA2018

Reports from the various conferences and their activities can be found at <http://linux.org.au/sub-committees> or their individual websites.

A timeline of all of Linux Australia's events can be found here: <http://tinyurl.com/koye3mw>.

Grants and Sponsorships

Linux Australia has long had a grants programme[6] open to its members for helping fund items that are in alignment with our values[2]. This year the Council approved 2 requests from members and sponsored 3 initiatives.

- Contributions to the Drupal8 Acceler8 fund to the value of \$7,500
- Grant Request from Andrew Donnellan to fund Russell Keith-Magee as a presenter at CompCon 2015 to the value of \$1,200.
- GovHack award “Open source bounty” for \$2,000
- Grant request from Donna Benjamin to the value of \$1,000 to support the release party for Drupal 8.
- DrupalCamp Silver Sponsorship to the value of \$500

Sub-Committees

The current non-conference based sub-committees are:

- Admin Team
- AV Subcommittee
- Mirror Team
- Web Team
- Sydney Linux Users Group
- LOGIN (NewcastleLUG)
- TASLUG
- Media and Communications Subcommittee

Reports from the various sub-committees and their activities can be found at <http://linux.org.au/sub-committees>

Subcommittee policy and procedure updates

During 2014 the council spent a considerable amount of time working on a new subcommittee policy to help with oversight and the longevity of Linux Australia’s various events[7]. The policy has proven to be a success and has ensured that our conferences have the appropriate help and responsibility assigned to them.

While the policy has been very effective in the early stages of a new subcommittee (during the formation and early budgeting) adherence to it has tended to dwindle as events get closer to their dates. One challenge is finding effective community members to help sit on

the various subcommittees. Another is clearly the larger amount of bureaucracy that the policy adds.

The 2016 council should pay close attention to this to ensure that events do not become complacent. A review of the policy would also be helpful given the extra data after having used it for over a year to make sure the policy is actually practicable and actionable.

Advocacy, outreach and related activities

Through our Twitter account, we highlighted articles of interest to the Australian Linux community and grew our number of followers.

Outreach relies on our members taking doing a lot of the leg work. We would like to encourage those interested to take initiative and reach out to the council for support.

Membership platform

One of our carry-over goals from 2014 we hoped to achieve this year was to update our membership platform (currently memberdb). Unfortunately other priorities and difficulties in infrastructure prevented significant effort being expended on this item.

The current membership platform is frail and in need of updating. We need ways to better manage importing of members from LCA registrations, and better ways of contacting our members who may not be on the mailing lists.

The Council, thanks to the hard work of Kathy Reid, has put together a list of requirements of a membership platform and will be looking for volunteers to help with shifting to a new system.

Additionally the Council has considered ways to keep the membership list relevant with only active participants. This is a continued discussion that is dependent on a new system to improve communication before any action can be taken.

Challenges

Linux Australia has a lot of challenges ahead of itself for the coming few years.

I would like to see the community thinking about some bigger questions. The organisation has been successful in recent years in running events but less so in lobbying to the government or advocating for policy changes etc.

Linux and open source are generally well received technologies and don't require advocating for in the same way that they may have been 10-15 years ago. This raises a question of how do we stay relevant as Linux Australia. In fact, it is pretty obvious that we aren't relevant as "Linux" Australia since we're much more about being an open source organisation.

A name change for our organisation has been discussed many times before, but I believe it to still be an important discussion. However, extending even further from that are more fundamental questions to the organisation. For example, with open source being so mainstream, what does that mean for us? Or what does the popularity of mobile and web platforms mean for open source? Are there opportunities or a need for advocacy in those areas? How do we extend our ideals to open web, open data, open government, open hardware and open culture? How do we ensure that our values[2] are upheld in our industries?

I would like to encourage and challenge our membership to be discussing these types of issues in a large picture sense and to be giving thought as to how we might be able to address some of them. Clearly these types of questions are very difficult to tackle purely at a Council level - especially when they are concerned with the administration and ongoing running of the organisation - so it is imperative that the community attempts to gain a consolidated voice in these areas.

A lot of these challenges are reflected in the 2013 membership survey[7] where our brand and purpose was often mis-identified by members not understanding what we do. Addressing these systemic questions will help guide the direction of the organisation and also lead towards addressing issues such as our poor communication to membership.

Closing comments

It has been an honour to be trusted by the community to lead this organisation for such a long time. While I haven't achieved as much as I had planned, it has been a privilege to be involved and to do what I could. I hope that I have been able to improve and continue the organisation's success during this time. Thank you all for this opportunity.

While I have left a large number of proposed, and deliberately unanswered, questions in this report, I hope our members are not discouraged. I believe that we've had a very successful year and from an everyday running standpoint we continue to be functional and productive.

However I also believe we will find ourselves at a crossroads where, without these questions addressed, over the next year or two we will fail to keep relevant and we risk

becoming complacent and existing purely to do no more than running conferences.

Perhaps that isn't a bad thing, but it really comes down to our community and members. The Council is not here to drive the organisation but to merely enable its members. As such the direction and outcomes of the organisation will be defined by what we can do collectively, and not by what the Council tries to do.

Of course with the emphasis on the members I can not state highly enough just how much work volunteers put into the organisation. I wish I could thank them all, but I don't think it is possible. Needless to say it is through the continued hard work of these individuals that Linux Australia continues to operate, and as such, I wish to say thank you to everybody who has been involved.

Similarly with myself not being on the 2016 council, that doesn't mean I will be disappearing altogether. I intend to help the new council on these challenges in any way I can. I also want to make sure that I'm available to consult and offer advice where possible should the new council wish to reach out.

Thank you all for a wonderful term. I look forward to watching this organisation continue to grow to its full potential.

Warm Regards,
Joshua Hesketh
- President, Linux Australia
January, 2016

[0] <http://lists.linux.org.au/pipermail/announce/2015-April/000202.html>

[1] <http://lists.linux.org.au/pipermail/announce/2015-November/000213.html>

[2] <http://linux.org.au/values>

[3] <http://lists.linux.org.au/pipermail/linux-aus/2016-January/022356.html>

[4] <http://lists.linux.org.au/pipermail/linux-aus/2016-January/022419.html>

[5] <http://lists.linux.org.au/mailman/listinfo/linux-aus>

[6] <http://linux.org.au/projects/grants>

[7]

https://github.com/linuxaustralia/constitution_and_policies/blob/master/subcommittee_policy_v2.md

[8] <https://linux.org.au/news/news/linux-australia-member-survey-2013>