

5<sup>th</sup> January 2014

## **Linux Australia President's Report for 2014**

By Joshua Hesketh

### **Executive summary**

Linux Australia continues to be the peak body for Open Source communities in Australia with a strong year. 2014 saw eight open source conferences run within Australia and New Zealand by volunteers under the auspices of LA. This continued growth in local events is a testament to the dedication and hard work of our collective and expanding community.

The Council this year faced a few financial difficulties. However, thanks to good planning and some minor budget reductions the long term viability of LA is not imperiled and the finances are in a great shape despite the small loss. This is largely due to the hard work of François, the Council and all of the subcommittees working to ensure budget tracking has become a higher priority.

Linux Australia continues to be engaged in important national and international discussions relevant to our values[0]. The Council, with significant involvement of Linux Users Victoria, made a submission to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade On the Trans Pacific Partnership agreement. This large body of work represented our communities' concerns with the content, engagement process and ratification of this controversial agreement.

The next few years for Linux Australia will be both challenging and rewarding. We should see the benefits being returned from the new subcommittee policy along with the closer eye on budgets putting LA in an even stronger financial position than previously. However I believe that our membership need to start facing various questions of relevancy as a community. Our branding issues due to the no longer apt name of Linux Australia are but one aspect that will need addressing. Future Councils may wish to formulate a five-year strategic plan for Linux Australia's next evolution.

Although this has been a year of ups and downs, I am absolutely confident in what our community can achieve, and incredibly proud of what we have done. I am honoured to work with such a dedicated and distinguished Council and I can't thank them enough for the hard work they have put in throughout the year. And, of course, as I continue to iterate, just how important and amazing our greater community is. Linux Australia as a whole achieves the outcomes it

does through its active, engaged and dedicated community members, and Council serves to support the community.

The Council does not achieve anything but what the community does.

## Events and Conferences

In 2014 there were 8 conferences/events ran as part of Linux Australia.

- linux.conf.au 2014
- Drupal South Wellington 2014
- LaTrobe Miniconf
- PyCon AU 2014
- DrupalGov 2014
- Wordcamp Sydney 2014
- Joomla Day Sydney 2014
- DrupalCamp Sydney 2014

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

Linux Australia has long had a grants programme[1] open to its members for helping fund items that are in alignment with our values[0]. This year the Council approved 4 requests from members.

- Blue Hackers' LCA2014 psychologist grant
- PyLadies flyers for LCA2014
- Contribution to Senate voting source code FOI request
- Growstuff funding

## 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>

## **linux.conf.au bid process**

During 2013 the Council, in consultation with key LCA stakeholders, decided it was in the best interest of linux.conf.au to move to a two-year out bid process. During 2014 we executed this plan for the first time taking bids for cities interested in running LCA2017.

This change has proved to be both successful and immensely helpful for the organisers to have the extra lead time. We'll continue to optimise this process as we start to get years leaning on each other more for knowledge and contact handover.

## **Subcommittee policy and procedure updates**

One of the focuses of the Council for 2014 was to refresh the subcommittee policy to increase accountability and insight into subcommittee activities. Most past and current organisers across all of our conferences, along with key community members, were consulted during the process and their input was invaluable.

In particular thanks to Chris Neugebauer for his hard work in putting together the first draft and implementing the numerous review cycle feedback. The final version of the new policy has been published in our policies repository[2][3]. Events that were formed on the old policy were not required to move to the new version, but new events will be formed under the new policy.

While a lot of thought and consideration was put into the policy, the Council does not feel it was executed on very well and that adherence to it was lost due to inconvenience. This will need to be a focus for 2015 to ensure we do not fall into a sense of complacency and to make sure the policy is actually practicable and actionable.

## **Mailing list for discussing policies**

During 2013 the Council observed a number of discussions, particularly oriented around various policies, derail to a certain degree and add a lot of noise to the generic linux-aus discussion mailing list. As such we saw a need to create a mailing list specifically designated for future policy discussion. This will allow those with a strong interest in LA's policies to take part in the discussions while not flooding the general chat list.

We would encourage members interested in taking part in policy discussions to subscribe to the list[4][5].

## **New mailing list policy**

Thanks to the hard work of Kathy Reid the Council finally finished the mailing list policy. We've had some constructive feedback since the publication that the Council will look at implementing in the next revision.

This policy is to give moderators appropriate control over mailing lists[6][7].

## **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. We contributed to submissions on the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP).

## **linux.conf.au 2014 Financials**

LCA2014 conference this year made a loss. The full details were discussed on our mailing list[8].

The short version is that thanks to careful planning and a general tightening of the belt, so to speak, Linux Australia is not in any financial danger. The total equity of the organisation remains healthy and we are looking at increasing our savings.

For the remainder of the 2014 financial year we operated on a reduced budget. A reduced budget has also been in use for the 2015 financial year. If we meet the budgeted profit we'll be in a stronger position in 2016 than we have been in the past.

While we are being cautious in reducing our expenditure we do not wish this to impact our

community activities. Our grants programme has been reduced but we are still encouraging applicants to send in requests. Additionally I would expect to see our grants programme grow next year.

Further details and the figures will be presented in the Treasurers' Report.

## **Trans Pacific Partnership agreement**

An excerpt from our submission to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade On the Trans Pacific Partnership[9] agreement sums up our position and work aptly:

“Linux Australia and Linux Users of Victoria strongly urges that the TPP and future trade agreements be negotiated in an open and transparent manner. Leaked chapters of the TPP have raised serious concerns that threaten Australian growth and innovation, but that have been held behind closed doors with limited consultation.”

The Council believes that the submission is representative of the Linux Australia community and hopes that members and individuals also stand against the practices and policies being proposed as part of the TPP.

A special thanks to the hard work of Josh Stewart and Lev Lafayette on the submission.

## **Survey**

Towards the end of 2013 Linux Australia conducted a survey of its membership. The key points from these, summarised in last year's President's Report and on our website[10], were used to help steer the Council in their decision making this year. We believe this to have been a valuable exercise and one worth repeating on a semi-regular basis.

## **Membership platform**

One of the goals we hoped to achieve this year was to update our membership platform (currently memberdb). Unfortunately other priorities prevented significant effort being expended on this item, but it remains on the todo list for future Councils.

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

In 2015 I would like Linux Australia to be thinking about some bigger questions. The organisation has been successful in recent years in running events but less so (with the exception of the TPP submission) in lobbying to the government or advocating for policy changes.

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 a relevant 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[0] 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 we 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 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

While I feel that 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.

I look forward to the coming year and the exciting, albeit unknown, future ahead.

Warm Regards,  
Joshua Hesketh  
- President, Linux Australia  
January, 2015

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

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

[2] <http://lists.linux.org.au/pipermail/announce/2014-May/000180.html>

[3]

[https://github.com/linuxaustralia/constitution\\_and\\_policies/blob/master/subcommittee\\_policy\\_v2.md](https://github.com/linuxaustralia/constitution_and_policies/blob/master/subcommittee_policy_v2.md)

[4] <http://lists.linux.org.au/pipermail/announce/2014-May/000179.html>

[5] <http://lists.linux.org.au/listinfo/policies>

[6] <http://lists.linux.org.au/pipermail/policies/2014-October/000010.html>

[7] [https://github.com/linuxaustralia/constitution\\_and\\_policies/blob/master/mail-list-policy.txt](https://github.com/linuxaustralia/constitution_and_policies/blob/master/mail-list-policy.txt)

[8] <http://lists.linux.org.au/pipermail/announce/2014-June/000181.html>

[9] [https://www.dfat.gov.au/fta/tpp/subs/tpp\\_sub\\_linux.pdf](https://www.dfat.gov.au/fta/tpp/subs/tpp_sub_linux.pdf)

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