

*EASA: The European Association for Studies of Australia*¹

Anne Holden Rønning, President EASA 2001-5

Copyright © Anne Holden Rønning 2009. This text may be archived and redistributed both in electronic form and in hard copy, provided that the author and journal are properly cited and no fee is charged

In the wake of various conferences dealing with aspects of Australian studies, the European Association for Studies of Australia (EASA) was founded at a meeting in 1989 at the Sir Robert Menzies Centre for Australian Studies in London. Present at the inaugural meeting were the following: Dr David Camroux, University of Paris, Professor Giovanna Capone, University of Bologna, Mr Ian Craven, University of Glasgow, Professor Tom Millar, University of London, Dr John O' Brien, University College, Cork, Professor Werner Senn, University of Berne, Dr Adi Wimmer, University of Klagenfurt. Professor Henna Maes-Jelinek, University of Liège was unfortunately unable to attend. Dr Richard Nile, Sir Robert Menzies Centre for Australian Studies acted as rapporteur. At this meeting guidelines for EASA were drawn up and Professor Giovanna Capone was elected as first President, with Professor Werner Senn as secretary/treasurer. The first Board meeting was held in Berne on June 6th 1990 and the first conference also in Berne in 1991.

The aim of EASA is to promote the teaching of, and research in, Australian culture and studies at European tertiary institutions by providing regular information for individuals and institutions about activities, resources, and visiting experts, and by putting scholars working in comparative isolation at many universities in touch with each other. From the start the Association members have covered a wide range of subject areas across the disciplines. In addition, the Board of EASA is always constituted with a view to a 'good spread' across the map of Europe, so that regional representation is adopted as far as possible. Thus Presidents so far have been from Bologna, Berne, Toulouse, Klagenfurt, Bergen and Roskilde. Within the framework of EASA some countries (eg. Britain and Germany) have their own associations for Australian studies. At present plans are under way to start a centre for Eastern Europe with a base in Debrecen. Today EASA is a body of scholars, teachers and students from 27 European countries and 113 different institutions where Australian Studies are taught at tertiary level. To begin with the Association received some financial support from the Australian Council for the Arts, but this is, alas, no longer the case.

Interest in Australian studies has grown in Europe, as is interest in an Australasian perspective given the increase in transdisciplinary and comparative studies. Springing, as much of it does, out of the European philosophical and cultural traditions, this subject area is particularly suitable for European students, who, with a starting point in a shared and known culture, can see how it has been adapted to another environment. In addition,

studies of ethnicity and indigeneity can contribute to a reshaping of our understanding of global issues and a multicultural Europe. Such courses are usually taught either as separate courses in some aspects of Australian studies, or as part of other courses in, for example, postcolonial literatures, anthropology, etc. Of the many universities where Australian studies courses are taught there is a dominance of courses in Germany, France, Italy, the UK and Spain. Otherwise there is a spread from Bergen in the North to Lecce in the South and Ireland and Portugal in the West to the Czech Republic and Hungary in the East. Despite this impressive list and the fact that student interest in Australian studies is widespread and growing, teaching of courses has, unfortunately, with all the cutbacks within academia in recent years, been one of many area studies to be affected, not least as it is also often person related in Europe. This, of course, means that teaching and research in Australian studies lacks a long-term perspective.

On the brighter side, in addition to the already existing Menzies Centre in London, the year 2000 marked the launch of a new Australian Studies Centre at the Universitat de Barcelona within the then Humanities Division during the conference “Changing Geographies: Australia and the Millenium”. The Centre started with the publication of a journal titled *Eucalypt*,—the first volume being by a group of anthropologists, HOMINID, who spent time with the Yolngu people in Arnhem (see <http://www.ub.edu/dpfilsa/welcome.html>) Altogether four numbers were published until the Centre was formally recognised as a full University of Barcelona Centre in 2007. At this juncture the executive decided to publish an online journal titled *Coolabah* of which three volumes have been published to date. The first volume of JEASA, the Journal of EASA will be published by the Centre in autumn 2009 under the auspices of *Coolabah*. The Centre has over five hundred members world wide, membership is free, and sends out news twice a month. More information can be found on the web page mentioned above. One of one of the major issues at the heart of the Centre is the necessity for interdisciplinarity across humanities and sciences.

The Center at Barcelona has run a series of conferences in collaboration with Australian Universities. In 2004 *Landscapes of Exile* was held in Barcelona. The following year saw the subject taken up and reshaped at the University of Western Australia and the Institute of Advanced Studies. In 2006 the conference went on to Southern Cross University and the next port of call was Canberra and the Australian National University. Finally it went back to Barcelona in 2008 under a new format and title “Myth, History and Memory”. Some of the papers from that conference are in *Coolabah* number three at <http://www.ub.edu/dpfilsa/welcome.html> Other centres have been set up from time to time at various universities for a short period.

Biennial conferences, which are also attended by a fairly large contingent from Australia, play an important part in maintaining the EASA network. Conference topics have ranged from “The Making of a Pluralist Australia 1950-1990” (Berne, 1991) and “Australia’s Changing Landscapes” (Sitges/Barcelona 1993), and “Inhabiting Australia: The Australian Habitat and Australian Settlement” (Copenhagen 1995) to “Maintaining the National” (Klagenfurt 1997), “Departures: Australia’s Re-Inventions of Itself” (Toulouse 1999), and “Reconciliations: 100 Years of Australian Federation” (Lecce 2001). In 2003 the conference was held at Aveiro with the theme “Australia —Who Cares?” and where a new constitution for EASA was approved. 2004 marked the creation of a separate EASA website, independent of the affiliation of the President. The

next conference in Debrecen “Revisions of Australia: Histories, Images, Identities” Australia” (2005) also marked a new venture with a one day seminar for postgraduate/doctoral students throughout Europe working in Australian studies, providing them an opportunity to discuss critical and theoretical issues in Australian studies. This is now a standard part of EASA conferences. In 2007 the conference returned to Denmark and was held jointly by Roskilde/Copenhagen with the theme “Translating Cultures: Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific” thus marking the inclusion of comparative studies of the region. This trend is continued in the 2009 conference which will be held at Palma, Mallorca with the theme “Dis/Solutions: The Future of the Past in Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific.” Selected papers have been published in book form after most conferences. EASA also publishes a newsletter edited by different Board members, and designed as a forum for debate in which all members are invited to participate, and will hopefully be re-established shortly. Further information on EASA can be found on our website www.easa-australianstudies.net

ⁱ An updated version of a presentation in *The European Messenger* Vol XI/2, Autumn 2002:65