

Kirstenbosch Branch address: Thursday 4 October 2018

On 30 November last year, I stood here and on behalf of the Kirstenbosch Branch Committee, made the following appeal to you, our members. I said "Now, more than ever, we need to safeguard our precious Society and all it truly stands for - mindful of the role of the people of South Africa as custodians of the the world's richest floral heritage".

We asked that every one of you will make it your personal responsibility to assist members you know, those with full time jobs, or who are otherwise occupied, to cast their votes when the time came.

You did the Botanical Society proud. More than 1235 members voted. More than 1100 voted in favour of a new Constitution. I believe that this 2018 Special General Meeting will be remembered for many generations to come. Members have saved BotSoc. Thank you very very much!

Thank you too to Mr Philip le Roux, the Curator, and the other Garden staff members for their moral support, the attorneys without whom this status quo would not have been possible, and all those who volunteered their assistance, who contributed in any possible way they could - Dot, Helgo, Lix, the list goes on... Thank you.

A huge thank you the Kirstenbosch Branch Committee: Keith Kirsten, Prof Eugene Moll, Natie Finkelstein, Catherine Gribble, Tom Robbins, Philip Howes, Cathy Jenkins, Bob von Witt and Margaret Kahle! Without their tireless efforts BotSoc could not have achieved this New Dawn.

But A New Dawn it is. The work that lies ahead cannot be underestimated. And we have to appeal to you to be patient. The September *Veld & Flora* had to be cancelled because the misleading one-sided editorial can no longer be allowed. However, it does have implications for advertisers and some interested parties adversely affected. I need to ask all to recognise the enormity of the task that lies ahead.

The focus will be on a) healing – this requires an accurate diagnosis and addressing the issues. And this is Council's priority. The Interim Council has resolved to rescind the signed agreement between Mr Dirk Muller and the previous BotSoc Council. The charges and matter in full were deemed groundless.

And b) on building. In this case – and here I borrow from Frank Webb, Chairman of the Lowveld Branch – "much of this bridge will have to be built while we walk on it".

To this end we are seeking a closer understanding and cooperation with SANBI. Kirstenbosch Branch members have frequently expressed concern for the interests of the other Branches. With the encouragement of Council, I have visited Bankenveld, Kogelberg, Lowveld and Free State Branches to better understand the challenges they face. And they face significant challenges. A visit to the remaining Branches remains a priority.

A Branch Convention has been scheduled for second week of November at the Walter Sisulu National Botanical Garden – all Branch Chairs will be in attendance.

In conclusion: BotSoc members have won their freedom. The question is, where should this freedom take BotSoc?

The AGM on 31 January is around the corner and you will soon be invited to recommend members for Council and, again, be invited to vote! "Mindful of the role of the people of South Africa as custodians of the world's richest floral heritage."

Thank you for your support and thank you for your attention.

Marinda Nel, 4 October 2018