

Notes outlining the historical development of the Federation of Wine and Food Societies of Australia with particular relevance to the Bacchus Clubs and the Wine and Food Society of South Australia.

The International Wine and Food Society was founded in London in 1933 by wine lover and dealer Andre Simon, with the express aims of bringing together people who had a particular interest – whether professional or amateur – in wine and in food and in their marriage, to raise awareness in the community of the pleasure and benefits of developing an appreciation of high standards and quality in the production and presentation of both and acquiring a knowledge and understanding of their value and contribution to an enjoyable and healthy lifestyle.

Individual societies had meanwhile formed in Australia informally but with a similar desire to learn more about wine and food and its enjoyment in a social context. The first one officially recorded is the Wine and Food Society of Victoria founded in 1936, followed soon afterwards by that of the Bacchus Club in South Australia which had 71 members by the First Annual General Meeting in 1940. Soon there were societies in all states and indeed the Bacchus Club had several branches linked under the name Bacchus by the 1950s..

As Wine and Food Societies developed throughout Australia, many of them became affiliated members of the International Wine and Food Society which remained based in London, a warm friendship developing between Andre Simon and foremost Australian member Victor Gibson of the Wine and Food Society of Victoria. In May 1966 a meeting was held to discuss an Australian division of the Society. At this stage there had been similar developments in the United States. Thus the First International Convention was held in Chicago in 1966 and the Second International Convention in London in 1970. Meanwhile the First National Convention of the Australian branch was held in 1969, the year of the first Council Meeting and A.G.M.

By 1973 as a result of dissatisfaction with the level of affiliation fees demanded by the International Wine and Food Society for services of little benefit to members of societies in Australia and because of the pressure of its growing waiting lists the Bacchus Club decided to disaffiliate. At the same time it was decided to facilitate the formation of a new society for those members who wished to remain affiliated to the International body as well as maintaining their membership as members in South Australia.. The new society founded as the Wine and Food Society of South Australia in 1974 is still in existence now in 2005, as are the Adelaide and Barossa Bacchus Clubs. However the South Australian Wine and Food Society (SAWFS) as it is now known has also broken away from the International Society after becoming a member of the Federation Of Wine and Food Societies of Australia though some members have become individual members of the IFWFS.

When Andre Simon suggested that the Third International Convention be held in Sydney it became clear that this could only be organised if the individual completely separate independent societies in Australia developed a closer relationship with each other. In May 1967 a meeting was organised in Sydney at which representatives of several Australian societies discussed the possibility of organising visits to other societies and joint functions and activities. This discussion led to the formation of the Australian Society, with a Federal Council made up of representatives (Councillors), one from each individual society and a national Executive Council of President, Secretary, Treasurer and Vice-President all elected from among members of the Federal Council.

In this way the Federation of Wine and Food Societies throughout and within Australia developed from an amalgamation of various Wine and Food Societies. A National Convention is held every two years and a Memorial Dinner is held each year in honour of Victor Gibson who was responsible for much of the organisation and administration of the foundation of the Federation. The responsibility for planning and organising these functions rotates between individual societies in the different States.

A system of awards has been established in order to recognise those restaurants and chefs who succeed in presenting food of outstanding quality together with impeccable service. There are also personal awards for those members who have made a significant contribution to the Federation as organisers of National Conventions or rendered particular services often over a long period to the National administration.

Rosemary Radden
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