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Friday, 17 April 2020 11:12



ACS reformers state their case Featured

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Ashley Goldsworthy - We've only just begun

The influential ginger group hoping to reform the Australian Computer Society is in it for the long haul, says Professor Ashley Goldsworthy.

The informal but influential faction of mostly senior ACS members is now calling itself the ACS Reform Group. It is led by Canberra academic and consultant Dr Roger Clarke, who initiated a successful court challenge (/it-industry/acs-loses-major-court-battle-over-irregular-vote.html) last year which annulled a poorly held vote on changes to the ACS constitution.

Professor Goldsworthy has become the group's de facto spokesman. An outspoken octogenarian, he was three times elected as ACS President and has also served as CEO, the only person to hold both positions.

He has become a vocal critic of current ACS management (/it-industry/industry-heavyweight-unloads-on-ac.html), calling for the resignation of CEO Andrew Johnson, while Dr Clarke has been much more circumspect in his public utterances. This week Professor Goldsworthy issued a statement outlining the group's intentions.

"The group which has gathered around Roger Clarke is both lively and well credentialed," he says. "Despite the group including many eminent business leaders, critics have written us off as a bunch of elderly academic fuddy duddies who represent the past. In fact, the ACS Reform Group is an extraordinarily talented group with a very wide range of experience both inside and outside the ACS."

Professor Goldsworthy said that the group included the ex-CEOs of a range of public companies as well as consultants and some academics. His own career was as Chairman or CEO of major companies in a variety of sectors. He was also President of the Liberal Party of Australia and

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has been awarded both the Order of Australia and an OBE.

"in addition to my own ACS service, there are others who have been ACS Vice Presidents, Branch Committee Chairs, served as Board Directors and Branch Committee members as well as rank and file members. There are also people with experience at the highest levels of major international organisations. In my case, I was President of the International Federation for Information Processing (IFIP). We also have people with Board level experience on the IEEE.

"The vast bulk of the group are not academics. They believe ACS needs to focus on being a Professional Society and should not become bogged down in commercial activities. Personally, I feel ACS has ignored, over an extended period, the importance of ACS professional membership as a requirement for employment. The failure to have this as strategic goal led to the situation where the number of ACS professional members has greatly declined over the last ten years or more."

Goldsworthy paid special tribute to Dr Clarke. "He holds a Visiting Professorship in Law at UNSW and in Computer Science at ANU. This background was pivotal in obtaining the outcomes we did in the recent legal case.

"He has shown extraordinary courage and judgement. It is a travesty and a great loss to ACS that the current rules were used to prevent him for standing for President. It is incredible that only last week Roger was again blackballed by the ruling clique (/it-industry/acs-rejects-clarke-again.html) from nominating as Vice-President.

"Our group wants to change the restrictive rules and regulations ACS operates under. The leadership group must become more accountable, transparent and responsive. I am still waiting for the President and CEO to reply to my letter of 11 March 2020 which asked for information about a number of financial and other matters. Their failure to reply casts doubt upon the stated commitment to responsiveness."

Professor Goldsworthy said there were many people who thought ACS should simply move back to the 2000 constitution, which made the Management Committee accountable, and which supported a strong branch structure. "There are energetic voices for such a move," he says "but exactly what we will propose is still being determined."

After Dr Clarke's nomination for President was annulled, high profile data guru Dr Ian Oppermann was elected ACS President (/it-industry/oppermann-elected-acp-president,-pledges-reconciliation.html). He has publicly expressed a desire to reconcile the rebel faction with ACS management, but in a statement last week to ACS members he said the coronavirus crisis has limited his ability to move quickly.

The ACS Presidency is an honorary position. Dr Oppermann said when he was elected he would reduce the time spent on his day job as NSW Chief Data Scientist, but that has not been possible in the current circumstances.

"Each day starts with a 7:30am data stand-up meeting with NSW Ministers and senior representatives of agencies including Health, Customer Service, Transport and others," he said his message to ACS members. "Some mornings, I head out to the State Emergency Operations Centre at Olympic Park for a presentation to the NSW Cabinet.

"Many companies and universities are actively assisting the NSW government with analytics or data. We have been frantically working to improve understanding of what is happening on the ground, identification of vulnerable groups and prioritisation of activities.

"All of this has meant that ACS issues have taken a back seat in terms of my attention. Not a great way to start a Presidency. I want to retain our focus on member issues, address concerns about state level agency, and I realise the need for more inclusive consultations as we move forward with corporate governance reform.

"I remain committed to helping the ACS move forward in all of these areas. We are working on a 'virtual congress' meeting for the near future and ensuring that meeting is an opportunity to genuinely discuss some of the most contentious issues. These issues are becoming increasingly clear.

"I look forward to re-energising ACS priorities."

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