

A major step towards the creation of a new organisation...



Craig Anderson

ALIA president
craig.anderson@alia.org.au

I am pleased to report that the majority vote at the Annual General Meeting held in Sydney on 17 August was in favour of appointing a liquidator. This vital step towards incorporation will set in train a series of events including an orderly transition to the new incorporated body, with a transfer of assets from the legal entity as set out by the Royal Charter to one which comes under *Corporations Law*.

The key activity which will now take place over the next eighteen months is the setting up of a new body under *Corporations Law*. This will provide the basis for putting in place the changes of structure and governance in the medium-term. Currently, the Royal Charter is very specific and prescriptive. For instance, it specifies who is on General Council, and that there must be a Board of Education. The terms of the Charter mean that any changes to the Charter, or the By-Laws must be approved by the Governor General. Seeking approval is both expensive and time consuming.

The move to *Corporations Law* will mean that the Association can change as our environment changes. For instance, the General Council of the Association currently has sixteen members. For the group to work effectively together, they must meet face to face on a regular basis — a very expensive business when there are delegates from all over the country. In addition, a meeting of sixteen individuals, all of whom have a passionate interest in the affairs of the Association can be unwieldy.

The intention is to move to a smaller Board of Directors, which meets more regularly, and should be able to move more quickly as issues arise. A key aspect of the Board of Directors will be that members will not represent specific groups or geographical areas.

This is in contrast to the current General Council which has one representative from each state/territory, plus other members (for example, past president), and several institutional members. While this is geographically representative, it does not always reflect the spread of sectoral interests, or member types. Given the population differences, it gives members in smaller states/territories a disproportionate say in the running of the Association.

In the past, there have been occasions of 'representational rivalry' where councillors felt obligated to put forward the view of the

branch which they represent. This does not always lead to good decision making. The new Board will consist of the seven best people in the country to run the organisation. There will be a combination of directly elected members, and those elected by the Annual Policy Congress.

The Annual Policy Congress follows the lead of the major political parties, which have large meetings annually to set direction and party policy. The ALIA Policy Congress will be held, when possible, in conjunction with the biennial conference, and will consist of representative from each divisional unit. The general membership will be encouraged to attend, but will not have voting rights.

As mentioned earlier in this column, incorporation is only the first step in this change process. The change which is more likely to have a direct impact on members will be the revised divisional structure. Currently there are about 120 separate divisions, or sub-groups in ALIA. This plethora of smaller groups has been both a strength and a weakness of ALIA. It means a high level of involvement for many people, but it also means 120 treasurers, secretaries, and presidents. In many cases, responsibilities overlap, and yet there can still be gaps between groups. In addition, the bureaucracy involved in setting and running a sub-group can discourage interest groups from forming.

The question of divisional structure is a difficult one. General Council has decided that it should be separated from the incorporation process, so that adequate time and attention can be given to the matter of divisional structure. A sub-committee has been set up to deal with this question. They will be bringing an options paper to the October General Council meeting. It is expected that this paper will provide several alternatives, and that these will be widely canvassed amongst the membership.

I believe it is fair to say that this next stage of the renewal process will be more lively than the current incorporation stage. The challenge will be to set up a structure which will maintain interest and enthusiasm at the local level, while minimising house-keeping and paperwork.

The challenges, and opportunities await us — now that the incorporation process has started, I am quite sure that we will see a rate of change which will simultaneously surprise, disconcert and please members. ■

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