

2024 AGM QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS

Q1. How will management resolve the issue of privacy preventing branches from contacting members?

CEO:

I have heard from many branches that an important part of the experience of new BirdLife members is being welcomed by their local BirdLife branch and invited to participate in local BirdLife Australia activities.

Previously lists of the details of new members were regularly provided to branches via email.

We have all witnessed the recent rise of cybercrime and the impacts of breaches of cyber-security.

The legislation governing how we can store, and access personal data has changed in response to these threats and BirdLife is no longer able to distribute member's details via email.

We are currently working on improving a solution where branches will be able to safely access this information within our existing platform, salesforce. This will enable appropriately authorised branch members access to records. We will ensure appropriate training and ongoing support.

I will keep the network regularly updated on progress through the regular meetings and we are working to resolve this in a timely manner.

Q2. When is BLA going to stop wasting \$ on Bird data? When will you accept that eBird is superior service and join it, with rest of the world?

PRESIDENT & CEO:

We are partnering with colleagues at Cornell to increase the uptake of BirdLife standardised surveys (such as 20-minute 2ha surveys) on both platforms.

It is Birddata that has the tailored monitoring protocols for threatened Aussie birds (currently 15 modules) and builds the survey management functions which enable the targeted conservation work.

Over 60,000 people have contributed to the Birddata database this year, and our data were downloaded every half hour for science, management, education or conservation work.

Both tools will continue to support the work of BirdLife.

Q3. Can members please receive a membership card as proof of membership and for reference?

PRESIDENT:

Thank you for raising this question. When a new member joins BirdLife Australia, they will typically receive a welcome letter to confirm their membership, membership offerings, and our proud magazine 'Australian BirdLife'.

Whilst I understand that membership cards have been somewhat discontinued over the years, we recognise that they are an important symbol and identity of your support of the organisation.

Late last year, the Board tasked the CEO and the Executives with recommending options to improve the members' experience and enhance the BirdLife membership. Their work is progressing. Your request is noted, and the Board will follow up with the CEO to track the progress amongst a list of comprehensive improvements discussed.

Q4. Is there any consideration of altering the rules to allow full virtual participation in the future?

PRESIDENT:

This suggestion would require an amendment to our Constitution and we can certainly consider that at the Governance Committee and the Board level. Ideally, we would want to look at our whole Constitution as to whether any other amendments are desirable. We could then put a set of proposed amendments to the members for approval. I will ask the Governance Committee to provide the Board with advice on the matter.

Q5. In the 2023 Financial Report, under Objectives, the first strategy adopted to achieve objectives is stated as: "(i) to build the Group's membership, supporter base and profile within the Australian community". The 2023 Annual Report then highlights that there are approx. 39,000 members.

a) What is the membership trend over the last 5 years?

PRESIDENT:

Yes, nationally, we have around 39,000 volunteer members of our local network groups. On average, we have had around 8,000 membership subscriptions in the last five years.

b) It is interesting to note that the number of WA members far exceeds both NSW and VIC. Why do you think this is the case, and how can we materially increase the number of members in the eastern states?

PRESIDENT:

Yes, probably part of the reason for the large number of WA members is historic. Whereas in other parts of Australia, there were two or more bird organisations, in WA, there was only ever the RAOU, so if you were interested in or studying birds, you joined the RAOU. WA had a large and active branch from the 1970s, when Stephen Davies was president and then Director and we had paid office staff running projects with the support of volunteers. This is the model that lots of young bird people grew up with, and so that is the basis on which today's BirdLife WA branch is now built. It is a highly active branch with lots of activities, as well as a number of sub-branches throughout the state which also organise activities - it is a large state with a long history of committed bird people.

c) The number of members is ~10% of total supporters. It would appear that there is an opportunity to convert some of that remaining 90% to members. Is this part of the strategy?

PRESIDENT:

We definitely would like to convert as many supporters into members as possible - more members mean a stronger organisation. And you may have heard from the earlier reply that the board has asked Kate and her Executives to look into options we can enhance the members' experience so that we can attract more members, our supporters are already engaged with the organisation - it would make complete sense to convert people who are already supporting BirdLife into members.

d) The Expenditure increase appears to have been driven by a 38% increase in employee costs. What is the context and background to this?

CEO:

Some increase in employee costs is linked to a number of key development initiatives that were approved by the Board to support the delivery of the Bird Conservation Strategy. There is an urgent need to respond to the worsening conservation crisis, and due to the healthy state of BirdLife's reserves, the decision was taken to start drawing down on the reserves in 2023.

The organisation also undertook a salary benchmarking exercise to ensure staff were being paid fairly as all staff are on individual contracts. The increase was also linked to annual salary increases being linked to CPI.

e) Is this also the driver for the decrease in cash reserves?

CEO:

Since the start of the year, we have been undertaking a review of BirdLife's operating model. This review made several recommendations, and I recently announced a change management plan. I briefed the network convenors on that plan a few weeks ago and will continue to keep the network updated as this work progresses.