

President's Report 2014

2014 has been largely a consolidation year for the VBA as we have worked to reverse the significant losses suffered in the previous 3 years. At the 2013 AGM, I outlined a plan to reduce our loss by about \$25,000 this year. I'm very pleased to report that in 2014, we have substantially exceeded that target and reduced our loss by over \$35,000 to just \$3,023.

Our balance sheet has also improved dramatically over the last year. Our cash holdings have increased by over \$46,000 to just over \$260,000 (we also hold some other funds on trust which inflate the figure reported in the financial statements). We changed the timing of state capitation invoicing this year, so the "real" cash flow in from operations was about \$27,000.

The backbone of our improved performance has been our improved table numbers. For the first time in 3 years, our table numbers increased. Overall table numbers were up 4% to 4,439. The biggest improvement, both in table numbers (up 173 tables) and percentage terms (up 52%), was our supervised program. That's a testament to the success of our new crash course program, which has now seen 200 new players learn bridge at the VBA in the last 2 years.

Competition numbers were up 6% but duplicate numbers fell 6%. That decline in duplicate is actually an improvement over the previous 2 years, and I'm optimistic about the future of duplicate at the VBA. New duplicate players have started coming out of our supervised program. As we continue to work hard on our lesson and supervised program, we should expect to see duplicate numbers increase.

We ran 5 of our new format one-day crash courses this year, which attracted 80 beginners. Easily the most popular of the courses was the one we ran during the Victorian Seniors Festival in October. We offered a discount to seniors which was very well received. We will be doing that again next year.

Although your Council has been focussed on costs this year, we have nevertheless continued to invest in the VBA and in your playing experience. Apart from the usual maintenance, we have improved our access to and use of technology. For example, we now email duplicate results to all players within minutes of a session finishing. I'm glad to say that the frustrating network problems we suffered for an extended period recently now seem to be fully resolved.

We were also granted a liquor licence this year, of which members are increasingly taking advantage. We aim to continue improving our food and beverage offering.

The VBA is of course also the peak state body for bridge. As a result of your approval last year, the VBA Council now includes 4 places reserved for Councillors directly elected by clubs around the state. I'd like to thank this year's Special Councillors (Pam Dingwall, Sarah Livingston and Rob Quirk) for their contributions and their willingness to engage so positively with the new governance structure for bridge in Victoria.

Smaller clubs, especially in country areas, can find it difficult both to find bridge teachers and to find bridge students. We recently ran a crash course in Traralgon as part of our commitment to fostering the development of bridge in Victoria, and we'll be looking at doing some more next year.

We brought Joan Butts to Melbourne again for her popular "learn to teach bridge" workshops, and we expect to do so again next year. We also ran a successful course for new and training directors under our new director development framework. Organised bridge doesn't happen without good

teachers and directors, and running these sorts of courses is a fundamental part of what the VBA is all about.

We adjusted our marketing grants program to streamline the granting process, and to make granting criteria clearer for all of our affiliated clubs. Judging from the quality and quantity of applications we have received recently, this has worked well.

At the Interstate championships this year, the Victorian youth team won their division and the senior's team took the silver in theirs in a tough battle with the ACT.

Several Victorian players were successful on the national stage this year, and congratulations to all of them. At the risk of leaving out some fine performances, I'll mention just a few: Peter Hollands won the National Open Teams, Neil Ewart won the National Seniors Teams, and Peter Hollands and Justin Howard won our own national event, the Victor Champion Cup.

The turnaround in our table numbers and our financial performance is very much a team effort – by everyone involved with the VBA. We're very fortunate to have truly dedicated Councillors and staff as well as many members who contribute voluntarily in many different ways. Thank you all.

One year is just one year and your Council will of course continue to work hard on making playing bridge at the VBA, and everywhere in Victoria, and even better experience.

Last year I closed my report with a simple reminder of the single most important contributor to making bridge fun for everyone, and it's so important I'm going to do so again this year – be nice!

Ben Thompson