

# President's Report 2013

2013 has been a very difficult year for the VBA. Over the last 3 years, our table numbers have dropped precipitously – from 7,090 in the 2010 financial year to 4,209 in 2013 (a 41% decline). The decline has been steepest in duplicates, where numbers have fallen by 45%.

With high fixed costs (much of it related to our large but expensive venue), our financial performance is very sensitive to swings in table numbers. In 2013, our net loss was \$38,282. We have some large non-cash items such as depreciation, and our cash outflow was about half that at \$19,644. Despite our poor recent operating performance, we retained a strong cash balance of over \$250,000 at the end of the financial year.

Rebuilding our pipeline – the pathway from learning to supervised to duplicate to competition – will take time but it is absolutely critical to restoring our membership and our table numbers. We are fortunate that our cash reserves give us some time to act. Of course, the pipeline is as important for every club in Victoria as it is for the VBA.

We have reinvigorated our teaching program, running 5 of our new format one-day crash courses, which attracted 120 beginners. That is more beginners than we had over the previous 5 years combined. We have also conducted a series of follow-on workshops, and added a new supervised session to our line-up (on Saturday afternoon). As a result, supervised numbers were up 9% in 2013.

And there is a small glimmer of light at the end of the tunnel. Our table numbers since the end of the financial year have been consistently up compared to the previous year. There is nevertheless a very long way to go.

In this rebuilding phase, we have to invest resources in growth activities, but we also need to tighten our belt elsewhere. We have many costs we can't immediately reduce (eg taxes), and many expenses it would be counterproductive to reduce (eg providing tea and coffee to our players is part of what we offer – and not particularly expensive anyway). Your Council is working on reducing costs where we can do so without negatively impacting your experience as members and players.

Within the VBA, we've tested many different things this year to offer more to our members, and to improve the 'club feel'. Some have been successful, others less so. Of course, we are continuing with the ideas that are working and have discontinued activities that aren't. Next year, we will be testing more ideas, always with the ultimate aim of making the VBA an even better place to enjoy playing bridge and the company of our fellow bridge players.

The VBA is the custodian of several small amounts of money intended to promote and improve bridge around Victoria.

For example, we applied for an ABF marketing grant to help us take the new teaching format to other clubs in Victoria and to develop a teacher accreditation program over 2014 and 2015. I'm very pleased to report that we were successful, gaining one of just seven grants from a pool that attracted applications for nearly three times the available funds.

We are also adjusting our marketing grants program to streamline the granting process, and to make granting criteria clearer for all of our affiliated clubs. If we can help Victorian clubs attract more players to our great game, and to provide a better bridge playing experience with more options, every club in Victoria will prosper.

Many Victorian players tasted national and international success this year, and congratulations to all of them. I'm going to highlight just a few, who represent the future of our game.

Victoria is fortunate to have several excellent teachers and mentors who are dedicated to youth bridge. Andrew and Cathy Mill have been the flag bearers for many years; Peter Hollands and Laura Ginnan more recently. Those years of hard work have shown in the fine results of Victoria's youth players over the last few years.

This year 5 young Victorians – Justin and Nathan Howard, Peter Hollands, Ellena Moskovsky and Max Henbest – were on the Australian Youth Team that took two silver medals at the 2013 World Youth Championships and the gold medal at the Asia Pacific Youth Championships a few weeks later. The Victorian Youth Team was our most successful team this year, winning the Interstate Youth Teams title for the 4<sup>th</sup> time in the last 6 years.

During this very arduous year, your Council, our staff and many members have been truly remarkable in their determined efforts to improve bridge at the VBA and throughout Victoria. I am very grateful to all our staff, who continue to go above and beyond.

Members being involved is what creates a club out of a mere place. I want to especially thank the many members who have volunteered this year, in tasks both big and small, from regular weekly commitments to short ad hoc help. Please think about volunteering next year when your club asks for help.

The VBA itself has several years of hard work ahead of it, but I'm confident in our ability – in your ability – to grow this great club, and bridge more broadly in this great State.

In closing, I'd like to remind everyone of what I think is the most important ingredient of all and what has become my catchphrase this year – be nice!

Ben Thompson  
President  
8<sup>th</sup> November, 2013