

The Case for Changing the Administration of Bridge in Victoria

Prepared by the Federation of Affiliated Bridge Clubs of Victoria, August-October 2008 for consideration by the Australian Bridge Federation.

“But when so many people make bad choices, it is ultimately unsatisfactory to point to human failings as the cause. The structures [and systems and ~~business~~-cultures] in which those choices are made must be at fault in some fundamental way.” John Quiggan in “The Age”.

1 Summary

This document argues that a new body (known for the purposes of this document as VicBridge) be established and replace the Victorian Bridge Association (VBA) as the Australian Bridge Federation's (ABF's) constituent and sole authority in Victoria. The fundamental reasons are ~~that (a) The administration and promotion of Victorian bridge is appreciably worse than that of other states (b) Internal~~ That internal reform processes have not worked and there is no prospect of their working in the foreseeable future ~~(c) b) that~~ VicBridge would be democratically structured and thus have a mandate assisting more forceful leadership and better administration; ~~could~~ would draw on more of the state's latent administrative talent; implement a strategic plan (two objectives of which are increasing the number of registered Victorian bridge players and improving Victoria's performance in national competitions); find premises suitably housing a centre for Victorian Bridge; and reinvigorate and re-enthuse Victorian Bridge.

The case has two bases: the objective assessment of Victoria's performance compared with those of other states; and support from clubs and players. Change, especially to a democratic structure, has the overwhelming support of affiliated Victorian clubs and many individuals. We commend the case to the ABF ~~constituents~~ Council and Executive.

2 History and Background

The Victorian Bridge Association (VBA) is Victoria's oldest bridge club. It has acquired capacious permanent premises that, parking difficulties and use restrictions (~~see~~ section 3.4) aside, are well suited to all but the largest of tournaments. The VBA premises are the locus of the state's administration and the state's best bridge; an overwhelming majority of the state's best players belong to the VBA.

At an unknown date, the ABF appointed the VBA ~~became the ABF's~~ as its constituent in Victoria. The VBA is therefore the body solely responsible for administering state affairs. Some of these responsibilities are organising state (and sometimes national and international) tournaments, each year organising a calendar of events including other clubs' congresses, selecting representative teams and delegates to national bodies, and promoting bridge in the state. The VBA also operates a local club (designated the Murrumbidgee ~~Bridge Club~~ bridge club [MBC] ~~or Poath Road Bridge Club~~ in this document).

Over the last two decades at least, there have been constant complaints of the State's communication, administration, and leadership. These deficiencies have been more or less constant despite some VBA officers striving to overcome them. ~~These~~ Despite exacerbation or amelioration by individual office holders; these deficiencies are manifestations of the underlying ~~business~~-culture and structure; sustained improvement will not happen unless

structures and ~~organisational~~ cultures change. Perhaps the most obvious dissonance is that VBA officers are elected annually by and from VBA members only; there is no electoral dividend in officers addressing state issues especially when this can be (and often has been) construed as threatening the VBA club's status and authority.

A wide variety of complaints are expressed more or less vehemently in individuals' responses to the FABCV's survey (see section 8) and in conversation. The clubs have replied in more measured terms. Two themes emerge: perceptions of unsatisfactory communication, administration, and leadership of the ~~state's~~ states affairs and (nearly as strongly) that the governance issue has spluttered on for many years ("We are sick of hearing about it.") and should be resolved quickly.

2.1 The VBA's Relationship with the FABCV

It is hard to ascertain, from individuals' memories or the incomplete documentary record, the precise history of the Federation of Affiliated Bridge Clubs of Victoria (FABCV) or its relationship with the VBA.

The FABCV was formed in the early 1970's, it is probably not coincidental that this was about the time when the VBA's membership, peaking at perhaps 1000, began to decline as suburban clubs became more popular. The FABCV was formed to represent clubs especially by taking their ~~views~~ cases to the VBA.

From 2001 at least, there is clear documentary evidence of persistent dissatisfaction amongst affiliated clubs, endless efforts to express and resolve differences, and constant failure to resolve long-standing problems. Stumbling blocks included: the FABCV's failure to persist (exacerbated by frequent turnover of the ~~FABCV's~~ FABCV's officers), players' general uninterest ("We just want to play bridge."), the VBA's insistence that it was the sole governing authority, VBA officers being unable to commit their successors (the VBA council is elected annually), major change requiring constitutional amendments that would have to be approved by VBA members, frequent VBA failure to follow through on commitments made, and also (it must be admitted) the FABCV's failure to follow through. This dissatisfaction is exacerbated by lack of consultation (e.g. on annual congress dates and appointments), the failure to inform clubs (the VBA council has stopped publishing its minutes on the web⁺) and provision of financial information (which started in January 2007 and stopped in June 2008²).

The VBA has been reluctant to recognise the FABCV: we do not believe that the FABCV has received a formal letter from the VBA since 2000 at latest. The VBA constantly, baselessly, opines that the FABCV does not represent clubs.

Since 2001, there have been at least three attempts to set up a joint committee (typically 3 FABCV+3 VBA+ an independent chair) to discuss problems and recommend changes. Only one of the committees proposed ever met regularly ([this committee was](#) chaired by Peter Wilkinson: an experienced ~~business~~ executive). Alas, the committee's recommendations were not implemented and the strategy issue was not pursued.

A relationship nadir was reached in 2001 when the VBA, without consultation, attempted to impose a \$10 levy on all state registered players, eventually being obliged to withdraw in the face of the clubs' vehement and concerted objections. The clubs argued that this levy was

⁺ ~~Resumed in November 2008, at least temporarily.~~

² [_____](#) A significant improvement was appreciated. Financial statements appeared monthly in 2007. In 2008 reports for the 1st and 2nd quarters have been issued.

unacceptable unless they participated in deciding how the money was spent. This decision highlighted the VBA routinely collecting money from non-VBA members (affiliation fees, red point fees, state event entry fees etc) but non-VBA members having no voice in deciding the level of fees or how these fees were spent; “No taxation without representation”.

Since 2001, the VBA has reacted to persistent and well justified complaints of an undemocratic structure by proposing two “reforms”.

- In 2003 the VBA and FABCV proposed the establishment of a “State Affairs Consultative Committee” half of whose members were to be elected by clubs³, and half appointed by the VBA council. However, this committee was structured as a VBA subcommittee that would have no power to spend or raise money and whose decisions could be ignored or overridden by the VBA council. The committee died stillborn and not much lamented. Neither party fulfilled agreements perhaps because of a lack of belief in the committee's power to succeed.
- In about 2003 the VBA changed its constitution so that its Council could augment itself by appointing a number of presidents of affiliated clubs⁴. The weakness in this arrangement is obvious: affiliated clubs or their members do not select who will join Council. There is an inevitable tendency to invite presidents with whom one has good personal relationships and who won't make too much fuss; but not to renew the appointments of those who remonstrate. The presidents thus selected are not representatives, but mere informants. In 2007 the FABCV wrote to the VBA suggesting two eminently suitable presidents. One of our nominations was accepted, the other rejected. Characteristically, the VBA did not deign to respond to the FABCV's letter. The VBA does not advise clubs of who it has appointed to ostensibly represent them. In fact, the VBA does not tell clubs who its Council's members are.

In 2006 the VBA established a committee to review representation of affiliated clubs. This committee seemed to comprise almost any interested VBA member who happened to drop in (but included all the VBA officers; evidence that it was regarded seriously) and three people selected, not by affiliated clubs, but (characteristically and revealingly) by the VBA itself. It quickly became clear that the VBA committee members conducted their debates before the meetings and attempted to persuade the affiliated club representatives to accept models that preserved the VBA's majority on committees governing state affairs.

The FABCV proposed models based on regions, clubs and individuals having voting powers; noting each model's pros and cons, but the VBA did not agree with any of the models proposed (see document “Models”). The two sides could not agree on a satisfactory structure for a body that would administer state affairs and the review committee was dissolved. At that point the FABCV essentially decided to petition the ABF to make a democratic body its constituent in Victoria but has (as it transpired) wasted time trying to engage the VBA in negotiations. At the time of writing, the VBA council seems distracted by problems pertaining to the use of its premises (see section 3.4).

2.1.1 Recent Negotiations

In 2008, the FABCV wrote twice to the VBA suggesting negotiations. The first time the VBA neither considered nor replied to the proposal. The second time (as far as one can tell,

³ One was to be a delegate to the ABF council.

⁴ [The failure to define, in the constitutional amendment, the number of presidents thus appointable typifies the VBA's administrative oversights.](#)

the VBA no longer publishes its minutes) the VBA secretary (then Mr Martin Willcox) apparently volunteered to assume responsibility for these negotiations. The VBA did not bother to reply or inform the FABCV of its decision. The FABCV president (Dr Beaumont) ascertained what had happened through several phone calls; it ~~seemed that the VBA Council as a whole~~ was clear the VBA council members contacted were uninterested in negotiations and seemingly relieved to have been able to pass responsibility ~~elsewhere to Mr Willcox~~. Dr Beaumont phoned Mr. Willcox who promised to send an initial document but did not do so.

Mr Willcox recently (1 October 2008) disinterred ~~the~~his negotiation proposals. The FABCV declined to participate because (a) there was no evidence that agreements arrived at would ~~be~~ endorsed or implemented by the VBA Council, let alone ~~forcefully advocated at~~steered through a VBA AGM. As far as we can ascertain, neither the VBA president nor vice presidents wished to participate in negotiations and that the VBA Council gave Mr Willcox no brief or terms of reference. (b) The refusal to discuss the fundamental complaints described in this document.

Whatever the intent of this initiative, the effect was to delay decisive action. The FABCV's efforts to reopen negotiations in 2008, to exhaust all possible avenues before requesting federal intervention, have merely wasted time.

Nevertheless, the FABCV ~~remains~~is prepared to enter negotiations with the VBA council on the fundamental issues described in this document if (but only if) there are very solid grounds for assuming that a VBA council will wholeheartedly and without delay advocate to VBA members and implement mutually agreed changes that substantively address the issues in this document.

2.2 Exodus of Players to Non-affiliated Clubs

An interesting development in Victoria and other states is the emergence and rapid growth of non-affiliated social and commercial bridge clubs. Social clubs are often attached to other clubs such as the RACV club, the Athenaeum, the Melbourne club, and golf and tennis clubs (exceptionally, the Kooyong Lawn Tennis Club and RACV Club are affiliated). Some of Victoria's larger clubs are commercial with a strong social ~~or recreational~~ rather than competitive ethos. Unless social players are motivated to count their green points, there is no point in their registering with the ABF or their club affiliating with the VBA.

We are not certain how vigorously the VBA or its successor should sell the benefits of affiliation to these clubs or social members. We more confidently assert that, if Victorian bridge was administered and promoted with vigour (e.g. by providing more varied kinds of events), more players would register and compete for masterpoints.

2.3 Fundamentally Undemocratic Basis

The Victorian Bridge Association (VBA) monopolizes administration and regulation of bridge in Victoria to the exclusion of other Victorian clubs and players. This monopoly was perhaps appropriate many years ago when the VBA was almost the only club in Victoria, it is no longer appropriate. Demographic changes have meant that suburban and country clubs have expanded leaving the VBA as the second or third-largest club in Victoria with only about 9% of Victoria's registered players.

The VBA council, with sole authority to manage bridge in Victoria, is elected by and from VBA members (i.e. 9% of Victorian players) only. If it decided to disaffiliate a club or raise affiliation fees from \$3 to \$10, \$20, or \$50, there is no way clubs or individuals appeal or have the decision reconsidered. The VBA council has no obligation to inform clubs or individuals of its decisions or appointments or to consult them before decisions are made.

A particular irritation pertains to Victorian delegates to the ABF and its committees; these are appointed by the VBA without consultation with other clubs. The appointees do not advise clubs of issues likely to arise, solicit their opinions on such issues, or report on the meetings' decisions. There is some [documentary](#) evidence of at least verbal agreement that the FABCV should nominate one of Victoria's delegates. Such an agreement has not been implemented for at least ~~three~~[four](#) years.

There is informal agreement that the FABCV (representing affiliated clubs) should be consulted when an annual calendar of state events is prepared. The degree of consultation has recently varied; sometimes the FABCV is not invited to participate. Sometimes agreements reached have subsequently been broken without the FABCV being advised or consulted. It is acknowledged that, for example, if the ABF changes its events' dates, rapid and drastic changes have to be made to the Victorian calendar.

The more fundamental point is not that the VBA repeatedly fails to communicate with and inform clubs but there ~~is an organisational~~[being a](#) culture in which ~~the importance of~~ communication with clients ~~and~~[or](#) customers ~~does not register~~[is unimportant](#). Contrast the ACBL's strategic objective of answering enquiries within 24 hours.

2.4 Victoria Compared with Other States

Table 1 demonstrates that Victoria has only about half the number of bridge players per head of population of other Australian states. It is hard to explain these differences demographically: perhaps Queensland has a high proportion of retired and affluent people; perhaps New South Wales is more affluent and has more of a club culture, but these seem weak explanations of major differences.

The VBA does not have a strategic plan or a goal for increasing the number of registered players. We feel that a different and more vigorous administration could work with clubs to increase the number of registered Victorian bridge players. We note the success of e.g. the Waverley Bridge club and some commercial clubs, especially in emphasizing daytime sessions, lessons~~;~~ and supervised sessions.

Strategy must address a more fundamental problem: the clientele is changing. Most players used to play for masterpoints. Now; an increasing number and proportion of people (vigorous retirees) play for enjoyment and companionship. In the city, night attendances are declining, day attendances are booming. Another change is that more clubs are being run for (perhaps not very much) profit. Some clubs are becoming serious businesses with their own premises requiring at least part-time professional management.

There are large numbers of non-affiliated people playing bridge in clubs such as the RACV and Melbourne clubs, the University of the Third Age, municipal libraries and premises, and in tennis and golf clubs. We are sure that the state body ought to be attracting some of these keener players to affiliated bridge clubs. We should be better at promoting bridge in the state and supporting bridge clubs, especially new clubs, especially in bridge free suburbs such as Werribee⁵ (pop 38,000).

⁵ [-](#) Obviously a disadvantaged and underprivileged suburb.

State	Registered Bridge Players	Population (millions)	Bridge players per million
ACT	789	0.327	2413
NSW	13264	6.782	1956
Vic	4629	4.934	938
Queensland	7115	3.757	1894
SA	1498	1.533	977
WA	3658	1.962	1864
Tas	756	0.472	1602
NT	133	0.209	636
Australia	31842	19.976	1539
Australia without Victoria	27213	15.0420	1809

Table 1 Registered Players per million⁶

2.5 Success in National and Selections

Victoria has performed very poorly in national championships and selections for Australian representative teams. The last Victorians to play in an Olympiad were Jim and Norma Borin (1972) (see Table 2). The last time a Victorian team won the GNOT was 1996 (see Table 3). ~~Curiously,~~It is curious that individual Victorians do well in the McCutcheon.

Victorian needs to find ways of encourage talented pairs to stick together for five or ten years and should create (or enable promising pairs and teams to participate in) tougher competitions. It is perhaps difficult to compete with Queensland and NSW which are more convenient for international visitors but Victoria should exploit the supercongress concept.

We speculate that the number of professionals or semiprofessionals who can in a living in Victoria is probably proportional to the number of active players. If Victorian's bridge population doubled, more professionals could make a living. More professionals might be attracted to Melbourne and become members of Victorian teams that might be more successful in ~~tough~~ national competitions.

⁶ Column 2 updated 21 Oct 2008.

1960	T.Seres W.Schaufelberger H.Oddie S.Bridgeman R.Cummings R.Williams
1964	T.Seres R.Smilde D.Evans R.Cummings D.Howard
1968	(F.Cayley) T.Seres R.Cummings D.Howard R.Smilde F.Altman I.McCance
1972	(F.Altman) J.Borin N.Borin A.Hancock D.Hoffman T.Seres R.Smilde
1976	(E.Ramshaw) T.Seres D.Howard L.Longhurst R.Klinger R.Cummings R.Smilde
1980	(I.McCance) T.Seres R.Cummings S.Browne R.Smilde R.Klinger P.Lavings
1984	(D.Askew) S.Burgess P.Marston P.Gill R.Klinger J.Lester G.Lorentz
1988	(R.Richman) S.Burgess P.Marston J.Lester G.Lorentz R.Klinger D.Lilley
1992	(Z.Nagy) T.Brown G.Bilski H.Grosvenor P.Gue D.Middleton G.Smolanko
1996	(P.Fordham) D.Beauchamp E.Chadwick M.Thomson J.Roberts B.Neill A.Walsh
2000	(D.Howard) S.Burgess P.Marston P.Newman M.Thomson M.Mullamphy R.Richman
2004	(M.McManus) T.Brown P.Gue S.Hans R.Klinger B.Neill T.Nunn

Table 2 Australian Olympiad teams 1964-2004

1986	P.Marston P.Buchen R.Grynberg G.Kozakos R.Smilde D.Stern
1987	F.Theeman K.Bagchi S.Browne A.Kanetkar J.Lathbury
1988	B.Neill P.Buchen P.Fordham E.Griffin M.Hughes A.Walsh
1989	J.Roberts P.Gill W.Lazer P.Newman M.Thomson
1990	P.Crittle G.Bilski R.Brightling T.Brown S.Lester R.Moore
1991	Z.Nagy P.Gue D.Middleton G.Smolanko
1992	R.Harms J.Chan K.Hocking J.Zollo
1993	D.Evans T.Antoff G.Bilski L.Bornecrantz T.Brown M.Lalov
1994	K.Dyke D.Lusk S.Lusk A.Peake
1995	D.Beauchamp E.Chadwick M.Chadwick R.Klinger K.Morrison P.Newman
1996	C.Chua R.Gallus S.Hinge D.Smith
1997	P.Chan P.Gue R.Januszke G.Sargent
1998	J.Haffer D.Horton P.Markey G.Smolanko
1999	V.Cummings K.Dyke R.Klinger M.Mullamphy P.Newman M.Thomson
2000	V.Cummings K.Dyke R.Klinger M.Mullamphy P.Newman M.Thomson
2001	V.Cummings K.Dyke R.Klinger M.Mullamphy P.Newman M.Thomson
2002	S.Hans I.DelMonte A.Kanetkar A.Reiner R.Richman D.Stern
2003	M.Courtney I.DelMonte A.Kanetkar A.Reiner R.Richman D.Stern
2004	V.Cummings R.Klinger M.McManus M.Mullamphy B.Neill M.Thomson
2005	Equal First: G.Bilski T.Brown M.Green B.Noble A.Peake M.Prescott; M.Derofo K.Dyke S.Hans T.Nunn R.Richman D.Wiltshire
2006	R.Brightling A.DeLivera D.Lilley P.Reynolds I.Robinson I.Thomson
2007	R.Brightling A.DeLivera D.Lilley P.Reynolds I.Robinson I.Thomson

Table 3 Grand National Open Teams Winners

3 Evidence of the VBA's Flawed Administration

There is plenty of evidence of the VBA's failure to administer bridge in the State with energy and purpose. We acknowledge that the VBA's 2004 and 2005 councils made efforts to improve the situation, in particular by communicating more with clubs, but ~~we stress that, fundamentally,~~ the problem lies not with individuals (who can exacerbate or ameliorate difficulties) but is rooted in the structure and ~~business~~ culture. We have the distinct impression that the present Council is somewhat distracted (perhaps by parking and use restrictions on its premises) and concerned about its role and purpose. The system is held together by the VBA's very competent permanent employees.

Perhaps the central problem is one of ~~organisational~~ culture. There is a bizarre view that only VBA members have administrative competence and experience in bridge matters and are thus qualified to administer state affairs. The VBA council has become unresponsive to suggestions. This is best exemplified by its laudable (2007) survey of clubs. Despite the FABCV's suggestion, the VBA did not invite clubs to participate in discussion of the results or exploit an obvious opportunity to start a dialogue with clubs. The survey ~~dentially~~ ~~fudging~~ ~~(that fudged~~ the governance issue) resulted in no decisions or initiatives (none at least that have been promulgated). The VBA is probably hampered by its annual elections and its decisions seem too often and too much influenced by ever-shifting personal alliances and enmities.

~~The VBA's constitution needs to be updated. The Victorian government recommends that not-for-profit organisations' constitutions incorporate some of the following principles: postal voting (to avoid misuse of proxies), mediation procedures, and declarations of financial interests. The last is of growing importance; bridge administration now entails serious money and a few people face potential conflicts of interest.~~ Current constitutional arrangements fundamentally weaken the administration of bridge in Victoria.

Rightly or wrongly, the VBA is often accused of using state decisions to advantage the Murrumbidgee Bridge Club (which competes with other affiliated clubs). The VBA Council has a conflict of interest: it is responsible for its members and local club functions, and also responsible for state affairs. For example, when it allocates resources such as the Poath Road premises or employees' time between state and ~~its~~ local club, its decisions may be considered with suspicion even if it has behaved with perfect propriety.

~~The local, Murrumbidgee, bridge club (MBC) has some advantages: superior catering, superior accommodation and a central location. We think it likely that, if the MBC was an autonomous body with a committee devoted to its success, it could be much more vigorous and successful than it presently is.~~

The VBA is unable to draw on the talent of all the state's bridge players, non-VBA members cannot stand for or be elected to the VBA council. Council members facing annual re-election have to answer to VBA members, not all the state's players. It is more difficult to formulate and implement long-term plans especially if such plans can be construed as adversely affecting the MBC or its members.

In summary, ~~we believe that~~ there is a "Failure to grip, a failure to drive"; ~~an over-concentration of the VBA club's internal affairs;~~ and (exemplified by the 2007 ~~and 2008~~ VBA annual reports) failure to recognize dissatisfaction, opportunities, and challenges.

3.1 Failure to Produce or Implement a Strategy

The VBA has never prepared a strategy or vision document setting out a plan to make bridge flourish in Victoria. It is telling that Peter Wilkinson, preparatory to chairing a series of meetings between the VBA and FABCV in 2002, wrote a paper outlining the problems and suggesting actions but that, as far as one can tell, the VBA did not pick up these threads. One does not have to start from scratch; the English Bridge Union (EBU) and ABCL both have documents outlining similar problem scenarios and appropriate strategies. VicBridge's proposed vision and strategy draw on these documents (see section 6).

3.2 Affiliated Clubs' Involvement in Major Events

Affiliated clubs and their members should be involved when major events are bid for, planned and run. When the state takes responsibility for organising major events (e.g. the national congress in 2004 or the congress associated with the 2006 Commonwealth Games), the VBA does not involve clubs upfront in critical decisions (Should we bid for this national or international event?), overlooks the talents of affiliated club members, many of whom are successful professionals, experienced club administrators, have run club congresses, and/or have been active in community organisations. In 2004 the VBA belatedly invited clubs to take responsibility for some of the national congress side events. The prevailing culture was such that clubs assumed that the VBA was trying to lumber them with some of the congress costs. If some affiliated clubs had been involved from the beginning, these suspicions would not have arisen.

3.3 Correspondence

We have examined the correspondence one club (Waverley) has received from the VBA from 2003 to 2005, and 2007-8. These items are mostly trivial or routine (see Table 4 that omits an annual proforma requesting clubs' office bearers, session times and sought congress dates etc). There is nothing inviting consultation with clubs, advising changes in office-holders, spruiking state events, demonstrating strategic intent, or promoting bridge.

"...communication is vital to the success of organised bridge" (Dennis Howard, then World Bridge Federation president, p. 30, *Australian Bridge* 2/30 April 1989). During the examined period, Waverley had a competent Secretary/Managers: it is most unlikely that theyshe would have mislaid correspondence.

3.3.1 Minutes

The VBA used to post its council minutes on the web but has discontinued between since April and November 2008. This is significant if only because Victorian players each contribute a \$3 affiliation fee to the state: they should, minimally, know how the money is spent and know of decisions affecting bridge in the state. Characteristically, the VBA president and secretary offered different explanations for this systemic failure.

3.3.2 Financial Statements

In 2007 the then VBA treasurer sent clubs monthly financial statements detailing the financial positions of the state and the local (Murrumbeena) bridge club and the way in which expenses and revenue were split between them. It would appear that the VBA now seems only quarterly reports. The last such statement provided pertained to the second quarter of was in June 2008.

Date	Description
1/11/2003	Notice pertaining to the opening of the VBA's new premises.
2003	Forms requesting information on Waverley's session times, officers, and venues.
14/2/2003	Letter from the VBA and FABCV noting agreement on several issues: establishing the SACC changing the proposed \$10 affiliation fee to \$3 and having one ABF delegate drawn from affiliated clubs.
9/2003	Enclosing a flier advertising an event supporting a charity.
8/12/2004	Enclosing the VBA's 2005 calendar.
12/2005	Enclosing the VBA's 2006 calendar.
24/9/2005	Email describing the revised VBA website and the virtual bridge room.
16 January 2007	"Bridge for Life" fundraiser
29 January 2007	Financial information on state and VBA club activities and the split between the two.
5 February 2007	Forwarding the ABF's advice that a copy of the Australian Bridge Magazine would be seen free to all clubs.
16 March 2007	Advice of a new national teams event organized by the ABF and a reminder of state events.
2 May 2007	Financial information on state and VBA club activities and the split between the two.
30 August 2007	Report on the VBA's survey of clubs.
30 April 2008	Financial information on state and VBA club activities and the split between the two.
1 July 2008	Financial information on state and VBA club activities and the split between the two.

Table 4 VBA's Correspondence to Clubs

3.3.3 The Good

One "treasure in the trash" is the VBA newsletter. This is of very high quality with e.g. testing defensive problems.

The VBA web site is of good quality except that ~~some~~ club contact details are out of date. A system in which clubs "own" a portion of the website and can update their own details would be desirable. We do not know whether this is technically possible.

3.4 The Poath Road Premises

A major recent decision of the VBA was to sell the Prahran premises and acquire and fit out new premises on Poath Road, Murrumbena. The then VBA Council perhaps too easily assumed that the municipal council (Glen Eira) would give appropriate permissions for use of the premises. As Table 5 shows, this was a grievous error; the Council restrictions severely limit use of premises that, according to the VBA's balance sheet, has a value of \$A1.6M. Council restrictions make the building far less valuable than its potential. The bridge congress associated with the 2006 Commonwealth Games, originally to be held at Murrumbena, had to be held elsewhere, a circumstance undoubtedly contributing to its expensive entry fees. The situation has been exacerbated by Monash Council imposing 1 hour restrictions on parking on the East side of Poath Road. We suggest that, analogous to

Sydney, the VBA will be forced to sell the premises and ~~move~~[build](#) elsewhere but it is fiendishly difficult to find a reasonably central location with ample parking. Maybe cohabitation with another organisation would be possible. Table 5 describes limitations on the use of the VBA's premises imposed by Caulfield council and the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT). The permit requires "invocation of valet parking during evening periods and during the annual National Competition events" ~~whatever that means~~.

Day	Time	Max No of People allowed to be on premises	Notes
Monday	10am. to 6pm.	80	
Monday	6pm. to 12pm.	160	Play must finish by 10.45pm
Tuesday	10am. to 6pm.	80	
Tuesday	6pm. to 12pm.	80	Play must finish by 10.45pm
Wednesday	10am. to 6pm.	80	
Wednesday	6pm. to 12pm.	160	Play must finish by 10.45pm
Thursday	10am. to 6pm.	80	
Thursday	6pm. to 12pm.	80	Play must finish by 10.45pm
Friday	10am. to 6pm.	80	No evening play permitted
Saturday and Sunday	10am. to 6pm.	90	No evening play permitted
One long weekend comprising three days each year	10am. to 11.15pm.	240 each day	Play must finish by 10.45pm., the premises and car park must be vacated by 11.15pm. The premises may be used for only one such long weekend each year.

Table 5 Limitations on the Use of the VBA's Poath Road Premises

4 Budget

Victoria's registered players each pay a \$3 levy to the VBA. This was the amount agreed to by the FABCV when the State Affairs Consultative Committee (SACC) was formed. It was originally capped for 3 years, but the mood of the clubs is such that they would not tolerate any increase. The VBA obtains other state income from a commission on masterpoints⁷ and state event entry fees. State expenses are listed in a document entitled "state/club split" (see document "financial statements"). As stated, about 90% of Victoria's players are not represented on the VBA Council that decides on the levy or how the money is spent.

The VBA Council has long claimed that VBA members subsidise state activities, that affiliated clubs should be grateful, and that this was one ~~(illogical)~~ reason why the present structure should continue⁷. That the VBA ~~modestly~~-subsidizes state activities was, [to a small extent](#), ostensibly demonstrated by monthly financial statements produced in 2007. The 2008 accounts so far released show that the state and club functions were both profitable. The difficulty is that the extent of cross-subsidisation depends on how expenses are split between

⁷ What VBA members thought of this is not stated.

club and state activities. For example, how should the salaries of the VBA's two permanent employees be split between state and club activities? It is very difficult (and pointless) to be dogmatic. We note that the VBA hires its club rooms to bridge bodies for a flat fee of \$250 per day regardless of the amount of space used or the number of sessions held on the day. This is generous, given the premises' book value of \$1.6M, less generous when local Council imposed restrictions on use and parking are considered. ~~Many~~[One might argue that such premises ought to be available to any affiliated club at no cost, if only because many](#) registered Victorian players who are now members of other clubs used to belong to the VBA and contributed to the cost of its buildings.

5 A Proposed New Body, VicBridge

5.1 Models Considered

Several models detailed in a separate document ("Models") were considered. A model in which clubs were the voting entities was chosen. The status quo was unacceptable and having individuals vote was impractical. Regional models were rejected because they introduced an unnecessary layer that would filter, distort, and delay information flowing between individual players and the state executive. Regions were retained in that clubs could choose to combine in regions when choosing delegates to VicBridge's ~~proposed~~ state council. A constitution (based on the WA constitution) expressing the chosen mode₂ is included in a separate document ("Proposed constitution").

5.2 Personnel

We stress that VicBridge will be a body different from the FABCV (essentially a lobbying body); it should have an executive comprising the state's most able administrators and leaders. We hope and believe that some members of both the present VBA Council and FABCV committee and other talented people would serve on the VicBridge executive. We do not want to conduct a "purge", ~~desiring~~[our goal is](#) an executive "of all the talents" that will further bridge in Victoria. ~~The~~[By the time this document is formally considered by the ABF Council, the](#) FABCV will provide a list of people willing to serve on a new executive. We note the possibility of having a body ("A Council of Elders"?) comprising people with expertise in e.g. finance, real estate, promotion, and law who do not wish to be involved in day-to-day administration, but are prepared to provide expert advice.

6 Vision Statement and Strategic Plan

6.1 Background

Administration and control of Bridge in Victoria has not fundamentally altered for decades despite changing demographics and a changing clientele. 30 or 40 years ago, the Victorian Bridge Association was virtually the only club in Victoria. It was natural for the Australian Bridge Federation to [make the VBA its constituent in Victoria, i.e.](#) delegate to the VBA sole responsibility for administering Bridge in the State. The demographics of Bridge have changed since then. Bridge clubs have grown in the suburbs and country towns: the VBA is now only the second largest club in the State (Table 7).

Different kinds of people play bridge (see David Scott & Geoffery Godbey "Recreation specialization in the social world of contract bridge", *Journal of Leisure Research*, 26/3, pp 275-295). There are:

- A core of first-class competitive players vying to represent their state or nation;

- A large number of people who enjoy competitions and accumulating master points;
- A growing body of people who play primarily for enjoyment;
- People who want to learn or are learning bridge but find the transition to normal competition difficult; and;
- Lots of people who could and would enjoy bridge but don't know about it.

The bridge population is aging: day sessions are becoming increasingly popular, night sessions less so. People are becoming more affluent, we should recognise that bridge is very cheap (\$7-10 for 3.5 hours non-stop entertainment ~~sometimes~~ with free tea, coffee, and biscuits) and that some people at least would be prepared to pay more to play in more comfortable environments.

The modern population has a wide range of possible recreational activities and is encouraged to keep physically and mentally fit (think Alzheimers). Bridge is one of a constantly increasing number of possible pastimes and recreations competing for people's time; we have to promote, even re-brand, the product and show how absorbing a pastime it is. There are grounds for hope. Many people retire from jobs that provided mental challenges and a social circle. On retirement, expecting to live for another 20-30 years, they may miss the social life and the mental stimulation that their jobs gave them. What better remedy than bridge?

6.2 Things that VicBridge Should Consider Doing.

6.2.1 Reflect Views of Clubs and Players

The VicBridge executive must maintain constant and close communication with clubs and players (most Victorian bridge clubs are non-profit but there is an increasing number of for-profit bridge clubs: their players should not be disadvantaged or discriminated against).

The VicBridge executive should establish a service culture: keeping in touch with players; responding quickly to inquiries and complaints; and doing things and providing services that clubs and players want (not what the executive thinks that they ought to want). Email and web pages will make communication easier but face-to-face contact will remain critical. The executive must make time for long-term plans, not be wholly absorbed in day-to-day fire-fighting.

VicBridge must justify the affiliation fees it charges by convincingly answering the question "What do we get for our \$\$\$?" There are essential tasks: e.g. selecting representative teams and paying their costs, running national and international congresses, supporting clubs' administrative tasks, obtaining resources for clubs, promoting bridge, running and/or facilitating learner and improvers' classes, and running state events. We hope that some of the items below reflect the bridge community's wishes.

6.2.2 Improve playing conditions

An increasing proportion of players are financially comfortable and probably prepared to pay for superior conditions (compare the facilities now provided at modern sports venues such as Telstra Dome with those provided 20 years ago). In some clubs (exemplified by the Poath Rd premises) at least it should be possible to purchase meals and drinks (including alcoholic drinks), converse in comfortable armchairs (perhaps while watching the last quarter of the game), enjoy a game of rubber bridge or backgammon, and be able to park easily.

Each club's culture and environment will depend on its customers and finances. In almost all circumstances, the State body should require strict adherence to the laws and proprieties.

Inexperienced players, especially first timers, should not be discouraged by rudeness and sharp practice or by being ignored, but made welcome. We need tournament directors who are personable and able to act as hosts (~~“sell the product”~~) as well as being technically competent.

6.2.3 Help clubs establish their own premises.

Having good premises probably means long-term leases or ownership. VicBridge should develop expertise needed to help clubs establish their own premises. This means understanding governments’ applicable grants programs, and having examples of architectural designs and successful funding applications. It is daft for each club to have to start from scratch. A small initiating loan might be possible. Some local councils (and the University of the Third Age: U3A) are supportive (“It keeps older people off the streets”), recognizing the community benefits of intellectual stimulation and social interaction.

6.2.4 Tap governments for financial assistance.

The Federal and Victorian State Governments spend hundreds of millions per annum on physical sports ~~and arts~~. It is affronting that ~~mind~~[mind](#) games get nothing. It is primarily the job of the ABF, but VicBridge could combine with e.g. chess and scrabble clubs, and cultural bodies to lobby the State Government. Clubs could help by lobbying their local members of parliament.

6.2.5 Improved technology

VicBridge should help each club acquire the technology and skills needed to run the modern game and club. Essential are a dealing machine; software that produces results shortly after a session finishes and interfaces with the masterpoint system; and a web site (or page on a State website)⁸. The State or ABF should provide a standard system for maintaining financial records and a membership database that produces mailing lists etc. The State body should have, and sparingly use, an email list of the State’s players who want to receive email announcements. Individual players should be able to access software that improves their game and be able to play on the Web⁹.

6.2.6 Investigate different forms of competition

We should make it easier for learners to make the transition from lessons, through supervised, to ordinary play. This may mean special, slower sessions, sessions in which only simple conventions such as Stayman and Blackwood are allowed; sessions in which beginners can consult experts; sessions combined with mini-lessons; stomping especially strongly on rudeness and rough tactics; awarding special ~~prizes~~[prizes](#) and recognising progress etc. Most people know a dozen others who started but were discouraged by rudeness or the gap between supervised play and ordinary duplicate.

Different forms of events should be considered: e.g. essentially social weekends away and bridge cruises (probably appropriate to private clubs). Restricted events seem popular (“We don’t get killed by experts.”) and goulashes are a possibility. Interclub matches, possibly mediated by the internet, might provide variety and the chance to meet new people (possibly in other countries).

⁸ ~~The directors’ forum November, Melbourne was eye-opening.~~

⁹ The ABF is providing this facility.

In most clubs, the prize list is dominated by relatively few members and prize money amounts to a steady flow of cash from the many to the few. Should we just play for the glory of it, in some events at least? Maybe more handicap or graded events are an appropriate way of distributing prize money more widely and giving novices the thrill of being placed. Effective handicapping depends on having a system that, unlike the masterpoint system, reflects people's current form. Should the ABF or VicBridge try to develop a system that reflects current form?¹⁰

6.2.7 Publicity

We should re-brand bridge. Its present image is a game for the old and eccentric. We have to somehow change its image to the truth: a game that can be enjoyed at any level of expertise, an absorbing mental exercise that staves off Alzheimer's disease, a great way of socialising and making new friends etc.

"It's a game you can play at any age. If you take it up young you have fun doing it the rest of your life. A lot of games don't have that depth. This one does." Bill Gates.

"Bridge is such a sensational game that I wouldn't mind being in jail if I had three cellmates who were decent players and were willing to keep the game going 24 hours a day." Warren Buffet.

Publicity means inviting mayors or MPs to open tournaments and writing press releases for the local paper (often short of copy), writing letters to the paper complaining about bridge's poor funding compared with sport, using big events to get newspaper articles published, and (with great good luck) getting time on (community?) radio and television. Chances of getting publicity are increased if some people are taught how to deal with and approach the media. It is baffling that chess gets an occasional media mention, bridge seemingly only when there is a spat about cheating.

6.2.8 Education

VicBridge must take responsibility for education by:

- Training tournament directors. VicBridge should estimate future requirements for directors at various levels of qualification and institute appropriate training, examinations, and (perhaps) periodic retesting.
- Training teachers. The State (or federal) body might organise standard materials for teaching modules (on Stayman, signalling etc). The State should ascertain whether there are enough competent teachers to meet demand and test the demand for education (e.g. "Defence to multi twos."). Teachers should be formally qualified.
- Fostering youth bridge, possibly working with schools (in which chess is a staple).
- Ascertaining whether there is a demand for teaching material for beginners, intermediate and advanced players, advanced training for representative teams, and/or young players showing talent.
- Tours (especially of country areas) by personable overseas experts would be good.

¹⁰ We believe that the ABF is working on this.

6.2.9 Starting New Clubs

Do clubs spring into existence spontaneously or can their growth be provoked? VicBridge should look at suburbs (exemplified by Werribee near Melbourne, with a population of 38,000) that do not have a bridge club and at least ascertain whether there is interest. The viability of the bridge club probably depends on socio-economic levels as well as population.

6.3 Objectives

The VicBridge executive should set itself some objectives for the next three years. Here is a tentative list. We know that it is more difficult for smaller, primarily country, clubs.

1. Double the number of Victorian registered players. This means improving playing conditions, easing transition from classes to play, providing good teaching, and using promotion and publicity.
2. Ensure that each club has (or has easy access to) qualified and personable directors, the hardware and software needed to run bridge, finance, and membership records: a dealing machine, a computer, software for scoring and posting masterpoints, an internet connection and a (possibly shared) web site.
3. Improve playing conditions; in particular, make it easy for people to move from beginners' classes to regular duplicate. This may mean offering different forms of competition and insisting on good behaviour at the table.
4. Help clubs buy premises or lease them long-term.
5. Improve Victoria's record in national competitions and selection events.
6. Run highly successful state congresses. Victoria does not run a regular supercongress.
7. Separate the administration of state affairs from administration of a local club.

7 Transitional Arrangements

There are three routes to structural change in Victoria. The first assumes that the VBA co-operates; the third that it does not. If the ABF resolves to make the proposed organisation VicBridge its constituent in Victoria when it is established, the following alternative processes are possible.

7.1 The VBA Accepts Change

Pursuant to section 29 (2) of the ABF constitution, the VBA advises the ABF that it withdraws from the federation and recommends that the to be formed body tentatively labelled VicBridge becomes, at an appropriate time, the ABF's constituent in Victoria. This seems exceedingly unlikely.

7.2 Outsiders take over the VBA

The VBA's powerbrokers agree to and facilitate outsiders committed to a reform agenda being elected as VBA officers. This is exceedingly improbable and fruitless unless the outsiders have a decisive majority on the new-elected council.

7.3 The VBA Does Not Accept the Need for Change

In this highly probable case we recommend that the ABF takes the following complicated but coherent steps.

- The ABF itself assumes temporary responsibility for administering bridge in Victoria.

- An interim Victorian state executive committee comprising about 10 people be formed. This committee ~~should~~will comprise 5 members nominated by the present FABCV executive ~~and 2 or 3 members of~~ the old VBA Council, and ~~two to four~~2 or 3 people drawn from outside these bodies. The ABF itself might want direct representation. The parties for change will have to have a comfortable working majority. The FABCV will identify people willing and able to serve.
- The ABF delegates to this committee day to day responsibility for administering bridge in Victoria until an executive committee of a body to be known as VicBridge is properly elected. As far as possible, the interim committee will abide by the proposed VicBridge constitution.
- A finance, a match and tournament, a promotion and any other necessary subcommittees similarly proportionately comprising members of the FABCV, the VBA, and new faces will be established.
- The interim executive will, with all deliberate speed, call an inaugural meeting (as far as possible consistent with the proposed VicBridge constitution) of all clubs to endorse a (possibly amended) VicBridge constitution, elect an executive committee, and pass any motions considered necessary.
- VicBridge becomes incorporated.
- The ABF recognizes VicBridge as its Victorian constituent and makes appropriate changes to its constitution. (sections 1 and others).
- The Murrumbeena Bridge Club (MBC) becomes an affiliated bridge club with no special relationship with the state body.

~~VicBridge negotiates office space at the Poath Rd premises or finds other premises.~~

- It is very much hoped that staff presently employed by the VBA substantially for state purposes will continue.
- VicBridge negotiates office space at the Poath Rd premises or finds other premises.

Splitting the VBA's assets between the MBC and VicBridge will be difficult but hopefully resolved by vigorous albeit good-natured negotiation. Have donors to the Bridge Foundation fund been donating to further Victorian bridge or the MBC? The FABCV acknowledges that the VBA owns the Poath Rd premises and the FABCV will make no claim to their ownership. However, the FABCV notes that many players who once belonged the VBA but have since joined other clubs contributed to the cost of the building. We hope that the MBC will continue to makes its premises available to the bridge community on generous terms.

7.4 Use of Poath Rd Premises

When VicBridge is established, it is hoped that the VBA (probably renamed the Murrumbeena [MBC] or Poath Road Bridge Club [PRBC]) will allow VicBridge use of the premises for tournaments and administrative functions on reasonable terms. If this does not eventuate, ~~VieBridge~~VicBridge's administrative functions will have to be carried out from rented office space, or by arrangement with a bridge club (such as Moonee Ponds or Waverley) that has or will have its own premises. Waverley BC hopes to acquire substantial new premises by early 2010. It *may* be possible to base state administration there if the VBA is obdurate or the Poath Rd premises are sold.

8 Evidence of Widespread Support for the Change.

8.1 Clubs

32 ~~of the then 48~~ clubs returned the survey. Statistics for each question are given in Table 6. Questions sought Likert scale answers: 1: very unsatisfactory; 2: unsatisfactory; 3: neither unsatisfactory nor unsatisfactory; 4: satisfactory; 5: very satisfactory; 6: no answer or no opinion. A list of Victorian clubs is given in Table 7. Responding clubs represented 77% of registered Victorian bridge players. Surprisingly, the VBA did not participate (it could have given itself top marks). If the VBA is excluded, responding clubs represent 84% of registered Victorian players. [32 of 48 clubs responded](#). Table 7 shows that almost all larger clubs (the VBA excepted) responded. There was near universal support for Q2 (a democratically based administration). The results may understate dissatisfaction; a member of the VBA executive responded on behalf of one small club, indicating that, on all questions, his club was very satisfied.

Question	Responses	Mean	Std. Deviation	Probability of being different from 3.00 by chance.
Our club is kept informed by the VBA of plans and decisions and any matters affecting us.	32	2.43	1.25	0.007
Victorian bridge should be managed by a body elected by and from all affiliated clubs.	30	4.29	1.39	0.000
The VBA successfully promotes bridge in Victoria.	33	2.01	0.78	0.000
The VBA supports affiliated clubs and their initiatives.	32	2.82	1.06	0.179
Our club is aware of a strategy in place to develop Bridge in Victoria.	31	1.73	1.08	0.000
The VBA supports people who play primarily for enjoyment.	28	2.52	1.22	0.022

Table 6 Summary of responses to an FABCV administered survey.

No	Club	Registered members	Responded	Comment
3-480	Waverley	553	y	
3-345	Borin	393	y	
3-301	Victorian Bridge Association	372		
3-348	Moonee	242	y	
3-360	Geelong	238	y	
3-445	Ravens	179	y	
3-408	Melbourne	166	y	
3-356	Frankston	165	y	
3-496	Yarra Valley	137	y	
3-317	Berwick	132	y	
3-320	Brownbridge	107	y	
3-315	Bendigo	106	y	
3-309	Ballarat	102	y	
3-308	Bairnsdale	91	y	
3-475	Theodore Herzl	85		
3-376	K.L.T.C.	84	y	
3-437	Peninsula - Vic	80	y	
3-465	South Gippsland	79	y	
3-478	Warrnambool	76	y	
3-415	Mornington	72		
3-430	Ocean Grove	72	y	
3-313	Benalla	66	y	
3-455	Sale	65		
3-483	Williamstown	57	y	
3-405	Macedon	56	y	
3-372	Alphington	55		Refused
3-340	Echuca	51	y	
3-440	Phillip Island	47	y	
3-477	Traralgon	45	y	
3-451	Rye Beach	43	y	
3-497	Yarrawonga	43	y	
3-379	Lakes Entrance	40		
3-335	Dromana	38	y	
3-338	Eastern	35	y	
3-433	Ovens And Murray	32	y	
3-361	Knox	29	y	
3-481	Upwey	25	y	
3-425	Northern	24		
3-375	Kattery	22	y	
3-410	Mount Martha	22		
3-330	Donald	21	y	
3-470	Sunbury	19		
3-343	Eltham	13		uninterested
3-435	Paynesville	12		
3-358	Rosebud	8		
3-479	U3a	5		
3-486	Wodonga	3		

Table 7 Which clubs responded?

8.2 Individuals

About 150 individuals returned the survey. These do not comprise a random sample; some clubs (e.g. Waverley) declined to make the survey available to their members. There was near

universal support for Q2 and comments indicated dissatisfaction with the present system and an urgent desire for change.

9 Summary and Conclusion

For many years, members of the Victoria bridge community have been dissatisfied with the state's administration. Long standing issues include:

1. The fundamentally undemocratic basis of bridge administration in Victoria.
2. Victoria's poor record in open national championships and Australian team selections.
3. Victoria not having a fully useable bridge centre.
4. Victoria, per head of population, having about half the number of registered players of the rest of Australia.
5. The Victorian Bridge Association's (VBA) poor communication, planning, and promotion of the game in Victoria.
6. The conflict of interest inherent in the state body running a local club.

These issues have been sporadically discussed but never resolved. There is impatience to get the matter resolved. We are convinced that the fundamental problem lies, not with individuals (some of whom have energetically tried to improve matters), but a dysfunctional structure and ~~business~~-culture. A root cause may be that the VBA Council, responsible for state and club affairs is elected annually by and from VBA members only. ~~The council minutes suggest interest in the VBA club, its building, parking problems, and state competitions; there seems little attention to affiliated clubs or the well-being of bridge in the state. There is little effective discussion with clubs.~~

The Federation of Affiliated Bridge Clubs of Victoria (FABCV), established to represent affiliated clubs (especially in negotiations with the VBA), has repeatedly and unsuccessfully attempted to initiate negotiations with the VBA and to have agreements implemented. The FABCV's two prerequisites to negotiations are:

- (a) It being demonstrated that there is a reasonable prospect that agreements reached by negotiators will be endorsed and energetically implemented by the VBA Council. It is implicit that the FABCV must be satisfied that the VBA Council would energetically press for necessary amendments to the VBA's constitution to be passed at general meetings.
- (b) The VBA being prepared to negotiate the issues 1-6 above.

Neither of those conditions has been fulfilled and nothing suggests that they will be fulfilled in the near future.

The FABCV believes that the only resource left to it is to request the Australian Bridge Federation's (ABF) intervention in Victoria. We recognize that intervention would be a drastic and unprecedented action requiring a decisive vote, executive action, and changes to the ABF's constitution. ~~Intervention is~~ We believe that intervention is justified by the state of bridge in Victoria and the ABF's constitutional obligation to foster the growth and development of bridge in Australia. In cases such as this it is almost obligatory to state that action is urgent. The real point is that there is no earthly reason to delay; the prospects of internal reform are remote indeed.

Appendix: Some Recent Events

Since the original case was submitted (5 November 2008) some other bits of information have become available and there have been a few symptomatic events. Both strengthen our conviction that Federal intervention is necessary if bridge is to flourish in Victoria.

This submission was written without access to some of the VBA Council's minutes. The minutes for the April through November 2008 meetings were made available during November 2008. Close reading suggests that most of Council's time is taken considering internal, local club, matters and a little time is given to state competitions. On the face of it no time is given to larger, strategic, issues. We suspect a lack of purpose and role uncertainty: "What are we here for?"

The VBA's 2007 and 2008 annual general meetings officers' reports do not mention Victoria's affiliated clubs or the FABCV's complaints. Two-thirds of the President's reports are devoted to thanking people. There is no trace of the need to strategise or to promote bridge in the State. At the VBA's 2008 Annual General Meeting only three of the eight ordinary councillor's positions were filled. This lack of enthusiasm can be interpreted in numerous ways. It is hard to argue that there is no scope for non-VBA members to contribute to administration.

The VBA recently received \$3,000 from the ABF to promote bridge and/or increase the number playing bridge. The VBA council decided to spend this on bridge education. This may be laudable but alternatives (Seed money for new clubs? Publicity?) were not, as far as one can tell, discussed, certainly not with affiliated clubs. The VBA organized a meeting of those interested in bridge education. This meeting decided to spend the money on on-line support for intermediate classes but closed with no clear idea of who was going to do what. Hard-bitten systems analysts know that, when there are multiple clients with different ideas of the correct answer, failure is almost assured. It is vital for the people developing the system to have close, almost daily, contact with a representative group of users. There is otherwise a high likelihood of developing a product nobody uses. Instead of reinventing the wheel, it would be good to look for extant on-line material. Apparently, the ABF is releasing another \$5,000 to each constituent for promotion purposes but characteristically, the VBA has not informed the wider bridge community.

The FABCV pointed out that the VBA's financial accounts included some fairly large amounts described by broad headings ("Administrative expenses") and suggested that a more detailed breakdown (finer chart of accounts) be used. This is *apparently* being done or planned (no need to respond to or acknowledge the request), but without consultation with people outside the VBA Council. The likely outcome is that affiliated clubs will remain equally suspicious of the VBA's allocations between state and club revenues and expenditures.

In November 2008, the FABCV organised a tournament designed to attract non-affiliated players¹¹. Although this event was enjoyed by participants, it did not attract the hoped for numbers although it certainly clarified a target market. There seem to be a large number of the University of the Third Age (U3A) sites in Melbourne at which bridge is taught and played. There may be a case for repeating the event in conjunction with U3A in 2009. Conversations suggested likely locations for two bridge clubs. Thus, the FABCV is doing what the VBA ought to be doing: promoting bridge in the State. Perhaps activities like this tournament would have been an appropriate use of part of the \$3,000 promotion budget.

¹¹ We note with appreciation Cathie Lachman's help in publicising this event.

Revisions

Revision	Date	Description
0	4/11/08	Version originally submitted to the ABF
1	15/11/08	Minor changes
2	20/12/08 & 30/12/08	Minor changes and an appendix describing recent events.