

The case for the VBA Cathy Chua

Like most bridge players, I have no interest whatsoever in my State Association. It organises bridge for me, I turn up and play. But since Nick Beaumont has applied to the ABF to close down the VBA for reasons given in his letter, it made me go out and do some research. I was surprised at the notion that the VBA could be THAT bad. Here I touch on his points one by one but AB is not the venue for a detailed analysis. Please visit my blog for that: <http://swatchless.wordpress.com>

1) Regarding the 'undemocratic' nature of bridge administration in Victoria, I was interested to discover that the VBA has presented various models of changed structure to State administration. Beaumont has rejected all of these. I don't know if he has done this with the backing of the members of the clubs he represents or on their behalf. Eventually the VBA will, I'm sure, come to terms with the FABCV on this issue. Perhaps it will be with different representatives at the helm of that body. One wonders if all is happy at the top of the FABCV. Over the past couple of years I understand that several of their administrators have jumped ship and joined the VBA as valued Councillors, ending their involvement with the FABCV in the process. Either way, I am sure that at some point agreement will be reached. It is an important issue, so the more time spent on it, the more options discussed, no doubt the better.

2) Does Victoria have a poor record in open national championships and open Australian team selections? You can see the full details of this on my blog, but the answer is a resounding 'no'. It has held its own or better in relation to the performances of other States. Significantly, the State which has the most 'democratic' model, Queensland, where the State Association has almost no presence whatsoever, has results at national level which are astonishingly bad. Meanwhile South Australia, which has taken away the function of the Bridge Association and given it to a democratic club organisation in the way Beaumont calls for, has if anything deteriorated in this regard. The conclusion one can draw from the available data is the more democratic we make the running of bridge at a State level, the worse it is for the standard of bridge in that State.

3) It is absolutely true that the VBA's wonderful, world class premises – certainly the best in Australia – are not fully utilised at the moment. It is also true that the VBA is in the process of rectifying that in an exciting way. The plan is for the area to be rezoned, the property redeveloped (I understand a developer is on board for this) and the net result will be a fully usable fantastic facility with benefits for all bridge players in the State.

4) Well, it isn't actually true that all the other States have more registered bridge players per head of population than Victoria. In fact we have about the same as South Australia and the Northern Territory and less than the other States. But on this issue there are two far more relevant statistics. The first is that since the late 1980s Victoria has increased its number of registered players by 70%. Only one State has a better record in this regard. The second is that we have the highest increase in number of registered clubs in the same period. It is pretty obvious from these statistics (the details of which are on my blog) that the bridge in Victoria is coming along very nicely under the auspices of the VBA.

Notably, SA, since SABA has had its powers given to a democratic organisation of clubs, has lost approximately 15% of its registered players.

5) I can see nothing in my investigations to date to indicate that the VBA is poor in areas of communication etc. One of the interesting projects they have recently undertaken is a major survey based on a questionnaire sent to all clubs in the State which resulted in a report I look at on my blog. The detailed analysis of the survey was sent to all the clubs with action to be taken based on its results.

6) Regarding the suggested conflict of interest in a Bridge Association running a club – well, I do beg to differ on this. Bridge needs centres of excellence, places where the top players congregate, get a good game of bridge, and others interested in getting to that level can compete against them. Bridge administration isn't just about quantity – maybe it isn't about quantity at all - but it IS about quality. It is the obligation of administration to promote excellence in the game. If you force Bridge Associations to abandon this part of what they do you end up like Queensland, a State which as mentioned, has a truly dreadful record at national level. It has no home of good bridge, and so good bridge players have no home. It is a very sad situation.

When I discovered recently that part of my entry fees for State events in Victoria – entry fees I expect to be given as subsidies for interstate representation – actually goes to the clubs, clubs which do not contribute to those entry fees, I was astonished. Hard to see this as 'conflict of interest'. Another interesting fact: I understand that in NSW the Bridge Association charges a licence fee for clubs to run congresses. Not in Victoria. Conflict of interest? I can't see it. Again, it is interesting to compare South Australia. The person in South Australia who agitated for SABA to be replaced by a 'democratic' organisation was the proprietor of a private club. There I CAN see a conflict of interest, when private profit has a say in the supposedly democratic running of an amateur, social organisation. It might be that his private interests correspond with the interests of bridge generally, but presumably we have to suppose not. Especially, since, as we have seen, to date the changes in South Australia have only been to the detriment of bridge there both in terms of quality and quantity.

I have unearthed lots of fascinating information during my investigation into bridge administration in Australia, dull topic though it may potentially be! Do go to my blog for detailed discussion of Beaumont's writings on the matter and some thoughts on what is.....and what should be.

It would be truly ironic if the VBA were not permitted to continue on its path at the moment. We have a President whose sense of duty is nothing short of heroic. I can recall a few years ago when, as some of you will know, she had almost no lungs to speak of, she did a tour of country clubs in Victoria with Paul Lavings. It was a dangerous thing for her to do at the time and it did have serious repercussions for her health. Now Jeannette does have two new lungs and has gathered around her a dedicated, motivated group of workers including several ex-officials of the FABCV, I really do think exciting times are ahead for bridge in Victoria.