

**Minutes of an Extraordinary General Meeting of Members
held on Thursday, 3 August 2023 between 4:00pm and 4:47pm AEDT
by virtual meeting technology**

Directors present: Linda Ford (National Vice-President and Chair of the Meeting), Elisha Ebdon, Susan Green, Chris Hannan, Fotina Hardy, Brooke Kooymans, Jessica Russ-Smith, Julianne Whyte

Formal apology: Vittorio Cintio (National President)

Management present: Cindy Smith (CEO), Geoff Bennett (Company Secretary), Alene McGowan (Executive Assistant to the CEO), Olakunle Adegbola (Training and Education Officer), Amy Wright (Hybrid Events Coordinator)

Members present: Per attendance register provided by Vero Voting

Electronic voting and electronic proxy appointment provider: Greg Mitchell (Director, Vero Voting)

Acknowledgement of Country

The Chair provided an Acknowledgment of Country.

Welcome, apologies and proxies

The Chair welcomed members and noted that a quorum was present for the meeting. National President, Vittorio Cintio, was a formal apology. The Chair advised that 344 proxies were lodged by the closing time for lodgement of proxies, which was 4:00pm Melbourne time, Tuesday, 1 August 2023. 336 members had nominated her as Chair of the meeting to vote on their behalf.

Introductions

The Chair introduced Board members, AASW CEO and Company Secretary and Mr. Greg Mitchell, Director of Vero Voting, the company providing electronic voting and electronic proxy appointment services to the Association.

The Chair outlined the “housekeeping” rules for the meeting, including (1) the process by which Members could ask questions about the resolutions to be voted on by Members; and (2) the process by which Members would be asked to vote on the resolutions.

Opening remarks

The Chair provided opening remarks and outlined the consultation process with Members since April 2023. The Chair noted that the consultation included issuance of two discussion papers and the holding of two webinars with members. 124 Members had provided written submissions or feedback on the proposals.

Criminal Conviction Resolution

The Chair projected the Criminal Conviction Resolution onto the screen and provided remarks in support of the resolution.

The Chair advised that the Board was of the view that the criminal conviction clauses currently embedded in AASW's Constitution are not considerate nor specific of the offences and is therefore viewed as discriminatory. This exclusionary practice undermines the principles of inclusivity, diversity, and social justice that are central to social work practice. The Board was of the view that lived experience is an invaluable asset for social workers (and others in the allied health professions). The increased empathy, relatability, knowledge, insights, advocacy, and personal growth that come with lived experience can help social workers better understand and connect with the people they support, offer unique insights and strategies, and advocate in a more effective way.

The Chair noted that there are already extensive legislative tools used by universities and employers to screen social work applicants including Working with Children Checks (WWC), the NDIS worker screening check, along with State and Federal Police checks.

The Chair advised that the Board envisaged adopting a criminal history membership standard that is consistent with that employed by the Australian Health Practitioner Registration Agency ("Ahpra"). Those standards will inform whether an applicant's criminal history is relevant to the practice of social work. Each case will be considered on an individual basis. Factors that will guide the Association's consideration include:

1. the nature and gravity of the offence or alleged offence and its relevance to social work
2. the period of time since the applicant committed, or allegedly committed, the offence
3. whether a finding of guilt or a conviction was recorded for the offence or a charge for the offence is still pending
4. the sentence imposed for the offence
5. the age of the applicant and of any victim at the time the applicant committed, or allegedly committed, the offence
6. whether or not the conduct that constituted the offence or to which the charge relates has been decriminalised since the applicant committed, or allegedly committed, the offence
7. the applicant's behaviour since he or she committed, or allegedly committed, the offence
8. the likelihood of future threat to a patient of the applicant
9. any information given by the applicant (e.g., mitigating factors)
10. any other matter that the Board considers relevant to the application.

The Chair articulated the Board's view that by adopting membership validation processes consistent with the regulated professions, membership standards would not be lowered. Indeed: removal of the clause would be consistent with the Association's purpose and values.

No questions were raised by Members present on this resolution.

The Chair then invited Members to vote on the Criminal Conviction Resolution and handed over to Vero Voting for this purpose.

Mr. Greg Mitchell of Vero Voting, outlined the voting process to Members, including use of the "for", "against" or "abstain" functionality within the voting tab of the Vero Voting platform. Mr. Mitchell

advised that Members in attendance and holding proxy appointments needed only to vote once and their vote and their proxy vote, would be processed. Mr. Mitchell held the voting window open for approximately 2 minutes to allow Members sufficient time to vote.

The result of the vote on the Criminal Conviction Resolution was held over until conclusion of the votes on the two other resolutions on the Agenda.

Retirement of the Australian College of Social Work Resolution (the “College Resolution”)

The Chair projected the College Resolution onto the screen and provide remarks in support of the resolution.

The Chair noted that the College had been established in 2011 by the Association to promote leadership in practice excellence and to acknowledge and promote advanced social work practice. Since then however, the external environment has changed. The College never realised the anticipated level of membership. Nor did it reach goals. Simultaneously, the Association has refined its strategic direction and changed its priorities. It now operates differently to the environment when the College was created in 2011.

The Chair noted that initiatives to develop professional identity, to gain recognition for all Members and the profession, to build communities of shared professional interests and expertise, along with the development of context-specific advanced knowledge and skills (for example: the Fellowship credential) have all been implemented or are being developed.

Established under the AASW Constitution, the College had been run by volunteers with some administrative support from the National Office, and a modest budget. The College Steering Committee has comprised Fellows, Members, and two Board representatives. The Chair acknowledged the endeavours of the volunteers who contributed to the College’s objectives.

The Chair then outlined the factors that resulted in the College not achieving its goals. Having regard to implementation of strategies to improve the professional identity and standing of social workers, the Board was of the view that the College should be retired and the obligation to maintain the College, removed from the Constitution.

In response to clarifying questions on the resolution:

- the Chair and CEO responded that key changes to the professional identity environment at AASW included the recent introduction of digital badges (which enable Members to showcase their verified social work qualifications, specialisations, education, training, experience and contribution to the profession), investment in the professional development and training team (was 1 staff member in 2018; now 13 staff), the Community Hub, mentoring programmes along with initiatives such as the PhD series - Advancing and Celebrating Excellence - which is complimentary to one of the objectives of the College, on its establishment.
- the CEO outlined the precarious financial position of the Association in 2011 which, at the time, prevented the Association from implementing the original vision for the College. In November 2011, the Board approved an austerity budget so that the Association was able to continue as a going concern. As the Association’s finances progressively improved over the years, subsequent Boards chose to invest in other growth opportunities, over the College.

The Chair then invited Members to vote on the College Resolution and handed over to Vero Voting for this purpose.

Mr. Greg Mitchell of Vero Voting, outlined the voting process to Members, including use of the “for”, “against” or “abstain” functionality within the voting tab of the Vero Voting platform. Mr. Mitchell held the voting window open for approximately 2 minutes to allow Members sufficient time to vote. The result of the vote on the College Resolution was held over until conclusion of the vote on the third and final resolution on the Agenda.

The General Meeting Resolution

The Chair outlined the reasons and rationale for the proposal to permit AASW to hold general meetings of members using virtual meeting technology, exclusively.

The Chair advised that changes to the Corporations Act, made last year, meant that a Company can hold meetings of Members using virtual meeting technology, exclusively but can only do so if permitted by its Constitution, expressly.

The Chair reiterated that even if Members voted in favour of the resolution, it did not mean that all future meetings of members will be held this way. The Board envisages that future general meetings will be held by “hybrid” means that is, a combination of “in-person” and virtual meeting technology.

The Chair noted that not a single member (other than the Chair and the CEO) was physically present for the EGM which suggested that Members were comfortable with attending an AGM or EGM, using virtual meeting technology.

The Chair reiterated that if Members approved the amendment, all the protections contained in the Corporations Act will apply to AASW.

In response to clarifying questions on the resolution:

- AASW - like many companies – was forced to move to an on-line environment for members’ meetings, during COVID. Whilst acknowledging that not having to host a physical general meeting will save the Company some money, the benefit to Members being able to access and attend a members’ meeting from anywhere where they can obtain an internet connection, far outweighs the cost to a member of having to present themselves to a physical members’ meeting.
- for members trying to access virtual meeting technology using outdated or legacy software: the Chair suggested accessing public libraries, workplaces or internet hubs, which can provide a member with access to personal computers that have up-to-date software installed.
- the Company Secretary advised that the processes (and rules) governing voting in this EGM were vastly different from voting for Directors in the upcoming elections. Members would receive an e-mail outlining the timeline, processes and procedures for Director elections, next week.

The Chair then invited Members to vote on the General Meeting Resolution and handed over to Vero Voting for this purpose.

Mr. Greg Mitchell of Vero Voting, outlined the voting process to Members, including use of the “for”, “against” or “abstain” functionality within the voting tab of the Vero Voting platform. Mr. Mitchell held the voting window open for approximately 2 minutes to allow Members sufficient time to vote.

Voting result

The voting results were projected onto the screen for each of the three resolutions.

The Criminal Conviction Resolution (Resolution 1) passed with 85.3 % of Members voting in favour of the Resolution. The College Resolution (Resolution 2) passed with 93.5% of Members voting in favour of the Resolution. The General Meeting Resolution (Resolution 3) passed with 95.2% of Members voting in favour of the Resolution.

Conclusion

The Chair acknowledged the vote and thanked Members for their participation. Changes to the Constitution would become effective from closure of the meeting. The Chair advised that the updated Constitution would be posted on the Association's website, as soon as practicable.

The Chair advised that the CEO and the Board would plan out next steps, including amendments to the ByLaws where necessary.

The meeting closed at 4:47pm AEDT.
