

7 May 2010

Dear Members

Second letter from the Presidents of Bird Observation & Conservation Australia and Birds Australia

We are writing to bring you up to date on the deliberations of the Joint Working Group investigating the proposal that BOCA and BA join forces. This is an opportunity for us to thank those of you who contributed your views in response to our first letter sent to you in January. All of your responses have been read and compiled so that a broad summary can be made. At the same time none of the detail has been lost because we recognise that many of you spent considerable time and effort to explain your views or to provide us with the benefit of your experience and advice.

Summary of Responses

In round figures Birds Australia has 8,000 members, BOCA has 3,000 and of these 1,000 are members of both. We received a total of 1026 responses from BA members and 460 responses from BOCA members. These represent 13 per cent of BA members and 15 per cent of BOCA members. Over 80 per cent of respondents supported uniting almost without stating a reservation or qualification; less than 6 per cent opposed the proposal outright; and the rest either: gave conditional support, supported the process without stating a preference for an outcome, requested more details, or left the decision to the respective Boards. While caution should be exercised so that this is not assumed to be a representative sample, the level of support for the proposal to unite appears, on the basis of responses received, to be very high, and the Working Group has proceeded on the basis of this to explore further an amalgamation.

We will now address three main points:

- First, the issues that were most commonly raised in your responses;
- Second, we will outline a possible model for a united organisation that would, we believe, address the legitimate concern some of you expressed that there were no details given in the first letter; and
- Third, the next steps in this process.

Issues raised in your responses

In trying to capture the reasons members gave in support of or in opposition to uniting, some generalisation is needed. The most common reasons cited by those who support uniting were:

- the desire to form a single, united stronger voice for birds; and
- to reduce direct and indirect costs inherent in running two organisations.

The most common reasons cited by those who oppose uniting were:

- the inherent differences in the activities, objectives and cultures of the two and the loss of activities and identity that would result from a union;
- two voices are stronger than one;
- there is value in having two complementary approaches; and
- concern that amalgamations are rarely fair to both sides.

Many of you raised concerns about loss of or change to some part of our existing organisations. BOCA members were most concerned about the loss of the branch structure and the loss of opportunities to participate in social birding through regular outings and camps. Other major concerns were around the future of key assets such as Clarkesdale, ABEF and the Nunawading National Office. BA members were concerned about a weakening of scientific rigour and a loss of focus. Many members from both organisations value the high quality and range of publications and hope they will continue, though many recognise that some rationalisation may be necessary.

Based on the responses to our first letter we consider there is sufficient support at least to justify defining some underlying principles that must be met, and to provide you with a possible model for a new unified organisation.

Guiding Principles and a Possible Model

The primary reason our two organisations are considering uniting is that a future is envisaged where one strong and united organisation is a more effective champion of bird conservation and a more effective representative of the interests of the members, than the two organisations would be. However the proposed union would not proceed unless it would be clearly to the advantage of bird conservation, and the interests of members.

We believe that the following principles are not negotiable:

- That this should be a true union of the two organisations, not a takeover by one or the other;
- That the separate and shared histories of the two organisations will become the history of a new organisation;
- That we would retain and foster the core activities and interests of the existing organisations;
- That all reasonable steps would be made to find financial savings; and
- **That the union of the two organisations cannot proceed unless it is desired by a clear majority of members and that every effort will be made to inform the members to aid in their choice.**

Following is a possible model for a unified organisation which should be seen as a prototype presented for the purpose of examination, discussion and feedback.

The model would encompass the establishment of a new member-based public company limited by guarantee identical in a legal sense to both BOCA and Birds Australia. The new company would be an approved environmental, and research organisation and a charitable organisation, and so would enjoy

the same tax benefits as BOCA and BA now do. Following transitional arrangements the Board of the Company would be elected by the Members. As the objects of BOCA and BA are similar the transfer to the new company would be relatively straightforward; the new company would seek to promote the understanding, appreciation and conservation of Australia's birds as BA and BOCA now do. In practical terms, establishing the new company would make the transition simpler because BA and BOCA could continue to operate while the new company is established. For both symbolic and practical reasons a new company would require a new identity. Loss of brand identity, including name and logo, is a potential risk as at first no-one would recognise the new brand. However, this could also be a golden opportunity to refresh and renew. The Working Group would consult with members about the name and logo of the new company. Setting up a new company with a new constitution would give a stronger sense of a union, rather than of a take-over by one organisation of the other.

Of major importance, the new company's structure would reflect the shared and separate interests of the current organisations. It should have four key operating areas covering: Conservation, Education, Research and Recreational Birding. The fourth of these would: "foster ethical bird observing as a social and individual activity directed to benefit Australian birds" as reflected in BOCA's current objects. As one company there would be one Board, one CEO and one Administration Division. The issue of the National Office was raised by many members. This will require further work and consultation with members by the Working Group.

To be fully effective the new company would need to operate at both a local and a regional level. The local branch structure of BOCA should be retained and the formation of branches actively promoted in areas where there are members but no Branch currently exists. The Local Branch structure is a great strength of the BOCA approach as it provides Members with an opportunity to become involved in their local area, and to interact directly with their local community. Local Branches would be encouraged to continue to organise enjoyable social birding activities and to participate in research, conservation and education programs as their interest and capacity allows. The BA Regional Group structure has also proven valuable, for example, in the engagement of State Governments and in managing regional projects. The new organisation would continue to have some form of regional or State-based presence, but quite how that would operate and in particular how the regional structure would relate to the Local Branches will take some time and care to settle.

We would expect Clarksdale, Gluepot, Broome Bird Observatory, and Eyre Bird Observatory to continue to operate as they do today. BA's offices in Sydney-Discovery Centre and Perth should also be retained. Likewise the various investment funds: Endowment Fund, Gluepot Foundation and ABEF could continue, and their proceeds continue to be used for their designated and separate purposes.

The relationships between the new organisation and other bird interest groups would require some careful and sensitive management. Many Members are also members of local or state bird groups and some have concerns about the potential impact on their group of the proposed union. BOCA recognises 23 affiliated organisations and has arrangements with them for the extension of insurance cover and for collaboration in activities of shared interest. BA has formal and informal arrangements with a number of other bird interest groups. We would hope that the spirit of cooperation and the goodwill required for

the proposed union to proceed would carry over into the interactions with affiliated bird interest groups.

The Next Steps in this Process

This letter is sent with the expectation that you will receive it and would have time to consider it before the Annual General Meetings of both BOCA and BA in May. This will give you an opportunity to seek clarification at the AGM on any concerns or questions you may have. At any time, we welcome your feedback.

The Working Group will meet again in early June to consider your feedback to this letter and the discussions at the AGMs. Should this feedback continue to be positive, during the second half of 2010 the CEOs will hold a series of regionally-based meetings to discuss the emerging model for amalgamation. The Working Group urges all members to make their views known and respond to the suggestions being made as only then can the deliberations of the Working Group truly reflect the wishes of our members.

If the respective Boards (Councils), advised by the Working Group, believe the primary objective and the guiding principles are met, and that members feedback to the emerging model is still positive, then members would be asked to vote on the proposal to unite at their respective AGMs in May 2011.

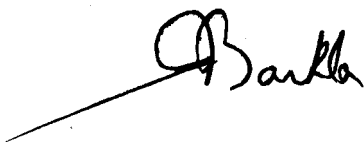
Your comments should be either mailed or emailed to either Chief Executive Officer:

Graeme Hamilton: Birds Australia, Suite 2-05, 60 Leicester St Carlton Vic 3053

Email: ceo@birdsaustralia.com.au

Richard Hunter: Bird Observation & Conservation Australia, PO Box 185, Nunawading Vic 3131

Email: ceo@boca.org.au



John Barkla
President BOCA



Alison Russell-French
President Birds Australia

