

18 August 2010

Dear member

### **Update from the Presidents of Bird Observation & Conservation Australia and Birds Australia**

As you know a Joint Working Group from BOCA and Birds Australia has been canvassing opinions from members on whether the two organisations should join forces.

When we last wrote to you in April, we had received significant feedback from members of both organisations, of whom over 80 percent were in support of the amalgamation, while less than 6 percent stated an opposition. This initial signal of support for the proposal to unite has encouraged the Joint Working Group to take forward some of the steps necessary to progress a potential amalgamation.

Based on your responses and further discussions, the Working Group has recommended to the BOCA Board and BA Council that the necessary steps for amalgamation should proceed recognising the benefits that formal amalgamation would bring both to the organisations and to our members. BA Council and BOCA Board support the proposal to amalgamate and accepted the recommendation noting however that the final decision rests with the members. You will have the opportunity to vote on this proposal at the AGMs in May 2011. In advance of this you will be provided with all of the information you need to make an informed decision. We are writing to you now to provide the answers to the overriding questions which have been raised in your feedback and to update progress by the Working group to date.

#### **A new organisation - what would it do?**

The new organisation would bring together the best of both organisations. We would still offer recreational activities for members encouraging appreciation of Australian birds, advocate for bird conservation, take on and oversee conservation projects, maintain our research portfolio, and run education and awareness-raising activities; all under the one banner of the new organisation.

The value of the new organisation would be to combine these activities to be more representative and inclusive and be a much stronger voice for bird conservation. The organisation would be national in scope, but retain a strong local feel through extensive membership and activities regionally and locally across all states.

#### **What would the new organisation be called?**

As outlined in our previous letter, the united organisation would, for operational and symbolic reasons, require a new name. A new name simplifies the transition arrangements and allows the new organisation to establish an identity which recognises, but is different from, both current organisations.

The Joint Working Group has recommended that the new organisation would be called '*BirdLife Australia*'. This reflects our vision that the new organisation would be of international standing by invoking participation in the global body BirdLife International. As a partner in BirdLife International we will have the best of both worlds. We will be able to retain our autonomy and

rights to self-determination as a national organisation, while at the same time BirdLife International acts on behalf of the partnership in global fora, and in the development of policies and programs we will be able to adopt and engage in. We hope a similar philosophy might apply in the new BirdLife Australia. The members' magazine of the new organisation would also carry the name BirdLife Australia to help with establishing an identifiable and consistent brand.

Both organisations' Boards have agreed with the suggested new name and instructed the Joint Working Group to take any steps that are required to ensure that the name is legally available, should the members' vote in May decide that the amalgamation will go ahead.

### **What would happen to BOCA and BA branches and groups?**

We would expect and hope that BOCA and BA local and regional structures would continue and ultimately flourish within the new organisation. The local presence and geographical representation of the new organisation would be central to its success. We understand the importance of continuing to allow branches and regional groups to have a considerable say in their current and future activities. While the exact structure and operation of the branches and groups has not yet been discussed, the Boards agree that the new organisation would wish to retain the value and contribution of the regional groups and branches, and any structural changes would be discussed through consultation with the wider group network. We are pleased to note that discussions have already begun between BOCA and BA at the local level.

One intention within the new organisation would be to focus more resources on supporting the group network. This would probably be a dedicated staff role within the organisation which would provide advice, support and liaison on group activities and operations.

### **What would the membership fee be?**

The fee paid by members would essentially be unchanged for those who are a member of one of the current organisations. For those who are members of both organisations, a single membership fee would be charged providing them with an immediate benefit upon amalgamation.

### **What would be the transition arrangements?**

To ensure the necessary governance of the new organisation during the transition period, an interim Board of Directors would be established after the May 2011 vote. The interim Board would be appointed by, and have equal representation from, the existing boards of the organisations. A Chair who is independent of the two current Boards would be appointed to guide the transition in a demonstrably impartial way. The interim Board would operate for two years until the transition was complete and the new organisation was operating effectively at which time voting for Directors by Members would resume.

The Boards have agreed to appoint Birds Australia CEO Dr Graeme Hamilton as CEO of the new organisation to provide continuity through the planning and transitional phases.

### **What happens next?**

We know that we have not yet answered all of the questions asked in your responses to our earlier letters. We hope you will understand that there is much to be done and we will continue to inform you as the Working Group addresses the issues and recommends a way forward. We would welcome your comments at any time.

In the next few months we will be working through a number of legal, constitutional and financial issues to ensure that a smooth transition to the new organisation can be achieved if the members wish the amalgamation to go ahead. Considerable planning is needed at this stage to show what we expect the new organisation will achieve so that you can judge for yourselves whether to support the proposal or not.

We strongly encourage you to take part in the vote - this is your chance to have your say and make a difference to the future of your birding organisation. Whether you welcome the amalgamation of BOCA and BA or oppose it, this is your chance to make sure that your opinion counts.

There is still time to feed into the process even prior to taking your vote in May. 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](mailto:ceo@birdsaustralia.com.au)

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

Email: [ceo@boca.org.au](mailto:ceo@boca.org.au)

We thank you for your interest and for your support for our organisations, allowing us to continue to work on your behalf for our Australian birds.

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