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SCOA AGM 2017

The Way forward,

Firstly I would like to thank you all for coming today to the inaugural AGM of the compete SCOA Australia. There has never been a time when SCOA needed the interest and support of its members more. We are still a group of ex public servants who continue to be disadvantaged by Government policy so we need to stick together.

In 2007, 10 years ago SCOA had 17,000 members Australia wide. This was enough members for the government to hear us on issues affecting us. As at June this year we were down to a little under 7000. Next year we will be below 6,000. This decline is of course due to two things. The main schemes we represent have been closed for many years and new potential members, in spite of our very best efforts are not joining. We believe this is because most public servants do not regard the APS as a life career and tend to move, on average, after 8 or so years and or do not always avail themselves of the option under the newer super schemes to buy an indexed pension when they do retire.

As a result our numbers are declining because of our age profile, our average age is 75 and because we are not recruiting

new members. According to some sums that I have done, which are generally accepted by our committee we will be below 1000 members by 2022 and therefore our voice in government circles will be almost irrelevant.

We have to recognise that we have a very limited life and that we need to improve the way we do things to make the most of the time we have left.

The first step in this process was of course to create a National body to streamline administration and decision making. We had to recognise that little could be done in the individual States to further our aims. That looking after the interests of our members was best done from a Canberra office.

Creation of a National body has now been done. It was not easy. The creation of SCOA Australia was however achieved through the hard work and dedication of your administration and committee and they deserve acknowledgement for this.

The only negative is that it should have happened years ago. But given the sensibilities of Australian States I suppose it's a miracle it happened at all.

As I see it three steps or tasks remain.

Firstly we need to research what issues that affect our standard of living are worth pursuing. Through a number of member surveys over the years we have been able to establish what

members think, indexation for instance is a favourite issue, but that is not quite what I mean. We need to establish which items have a possibility of being successful in say the next 3 years. Issues where we have a good chance of reporting to members in three years time that we have achieved legislative or policy change.

Now without wishing to pre-empt the results of any research I would see out of the long list of what we want only two issues, and I emphasise this is only my understanding of the general SCOA view as far as I have been able to ascertain it, have legs (for want of a better phrase). They are:-

Taxation of our pensions

AND

Proper Cost of living indexation of our pensions as promised under the original PSS and CSS legislation.

Other matters such as the 10%, the 1.6 million cap on superannuation contributions, dental services, deeming rates, stamp duty on the sale of a home on downsizing, nursing home fees are all common to all pensioners and are being dealt with by other organisations.

We should only deal with matters or issues peculiar to our particular group of Commonwealth public service superannuants.

Secondly having decided on which issues we should pursue we then need to update our arguments to reflect the very latest available information and put them into clear concise briefing papers, which we then conscientiously continue to update as further information comes to hand.

This is an exercise that must be done with great care as the slightest mistake can discredit us and completely close off a potential contact in the government.

For instance we have a lot of information on indexation; a lot of people within SCOA have had a go at preparing arguments showing we commonwealth superannuants have not, for decades, been receiving proper Cost of Living adjustments and made representation to politicians accordingly. However with the exception of John Coleman's effective tenure as president lobbying for fair indexation has not been a coordinated effort.

This important task needs to become the responsibility of the SCOA administration. It needs to become the responsibility of an employed dedicated research officer answerable to the executive officer.

Thirdly we need to approach government far more professionally, by following a carefully prepared plan. Incidentally approaching government used to be called lobbying but in an attempt to make it sound more acceptable it

is now called Government Liaison. A SCOA Government Liaison plan is something we have never had, to our shame.

Many of our members and committees have from time to time conscientiously approached politicians but our approach in the past has been very ad-hoc and consequently mostly ineffective. Any successful lobbyist, say someone from the anti smoking or the environmental lobby groups, groups who have been very successful over a long period would probably be very disparaging about our approach to lobbying.

This is not a criticism of the SCOA people who have been involved in lobbying but a criticism of the resources SCOA has applied to lobbying. Lobbying requires more than the part time attention of a voluntary President.

Such a plan would start by getting our dedicated research officer to do research listing all the politicians, including ministers and shadow ministers in Parliament, researching how they got elected, what are their areas of interest and how they have voted in the past on areas that affect us.

What is the background of their advisors, (all parliamentarians have advisors). The researcher should then select and list suitable contacts to establish contact with.

That means a contact plan, letters, briefs, visits, regular contact, presentations to groups associated with the politician, above all

a plan to follow up and keep following up. All committee members should become involved in a contact plan. The goal should be to have a total of 20 ministers, shadow ministers and selected MPs on such a list.

The present Executive Officer would then have carriage, be the public face, of this SCOA government liaison plan, assisted as needed by the President.

To recognise the increase in responsibility of the Executive Officer position it should be renamed National Director. This too would importantly improve the status of the position when dealing with politicians and senior government officials.

Dealing with these three issues may require more resources. However we already have potential savings, We no longer have a federal council or state administrative committees to liaise with, our membership has substantially reduced, our accounting has been streamlined and could be further so and other savings will appear as SCOA Australia settles down.

Employing a part-time Research officer and extra admin assistance is quite possible if we are prepared to run a modest yearly deficit.

We can afford to run at a deficit of at least \$40,000 pa by using up our considerable reserve of \$300,000. Indeed not to use up our reserves is betraying the conscientious contributions of

many members who, since 1923 religiously paid subscriptions, often a material amount to them, on the understanding that it would be used to further their interests. Winding up SCOA in 2023 and seeing their funds disappear into a Government approved organisation which in all probability would not have SCOA's focus, because we have become too small to operate would be a breach of that trust.

So to summarise I see that we only have 5 years to make an impact of the issues that affect us. I personally see the important issues as Taxation of our Pensions and Indexation. You may decide it's something else. But to do any issues justice we need to organise more professionally. We need to employ a part time Research officer with a specific task to update our arguments and plan our government contact. Our present Executive Officer, re titled National Director needs to be relieved of some of her administration duties to take carriage of the Govt Liaison plan.

If this means, (and it may not) running at a deficit we should accept that. As I said members past and present would not appreciate their carefully contributed funds passed out of our hands, our funds, so carefully accumulated and husbanded not having been used to look after their interests.

SCOA has a limited life. Time is of the essence. We should, like us all, take full advantage of the time left if we are to achieve anything worthwhile for our members.

Thank you