

CONSTITUTION TRANSITION UPDATE

A series of 18 meetings have been held across the Freemasons Victoria Districts throughout the State.

The meetings were designed to explain some of the proposed changes to the Book of Constitutions, and to listen the views of members across Victoria.

Several more meetings are scheduled to be held in November, culminating with a state-wide Zoom meeting on Wednesday evening, 30 November 2022.

Behind the scenes, a Constitution Transition Team - headed by Harry Jenkins AO, former Speaker of the Australian House of Representatives - has been meeting regularly to lead the change process.

Additionally, the Legal and Constitution Committee - led by VWBro. Ian Upjohn, KC, Grand Registrar - have been completing the work needed for the first phase of changes, to be announced in a Notice of Motion to be presented at the Quarterly Communication on Wednesday 14 December 2022.

That Motion will be voted upon by members early in 2023. This first Motion chiefly deals with Rules 300- 339 and focuses on permanent arrangements for the Masonic Council and Commercial Council, which have been trialled throughout 2022.

Other proposed changes are to follow in several phases, extending over 2023 and 2024. The Constitution Transition Team has recommended an incremental approach, so that members can fully consider the changes required for a governance document that should serve us well throughout the remainder of the 21st century.

In the coming week, a draft Discussion Paper on the proposed changes will be released, and members will be invited to contribute their written comments during a consultative period leading up to the 30 November Zoom meeting.

In the meantime, it has been thought that it may be useful to publish a review of what has been heard to date at the Forums held across Victoria.

Grand Secretary's Report

From late July, a roadshow covering almost every district was conducted to discuss Constitutional reform and the directions and ideas for the next 18-24 months. During this period, 18 Consultative sessions were held.

I would like to thank all Brethren who took the time to attend one or more of the sessions.

These sessions were presented by the Grand Secretary, the Grand Registrar and assisted by several members of the Constitution Transition Committee.

The sessions were positive and vibrant, and ideas discussed were enthusiastically embraced by Brethren with positive feedback received. A forum to share these ideas was considered necessary and important for the future of our organisation.

Many questions were asked related to Constitutional matters which demonstrated the hunger for understanding the changes, rationale, and practicalities of the proposed new governance structure.



RWBro. Bruce Cowie

The focus was made clear that the sessions were about seeking feedback from the membership generally to assist in planning and drafting changes to the book of Constitutions.

This report will focus on the first and major imperative: Governance of Freemasonry in Victoria.

The imperative to change of the governance structure has been evident for several years.

During the roadshow the background was outlined and discussed, and the purposes of each Council explained. Some very clear questions were raised, discussed, answered, and taken away for further consideration.

For completeness the questions have been summarised into the following key discussion points.

Deadlock Between Councils

This can be resolved in a number of ways, including a joint sitting of both Councils and if this does not bring the matter to a conclusion, the Grand Master could take the matter to the floor of Grand Lodge for a decision by the membership.

Selection of Appropriate Brethren to Serve on Each Council

This would be achieved by calling for nominations and the members electing the preferred candidates in an open and transparent vote.

Terms of Appointment to Either Council

A limited term of three years before re-election was discussed with no more than two successive terms agreed as necessary to ensure new membership regularly.

Selection of the Independent Members

This could not be achieved by a vote of the members but rather by selection of appropriately qualified people who applied and were selected via an independent process agreed by the membership.

Elimination of Conflicts of Interest

Potential and real conflicts of interest must be declared, to ensure transparency and fairness.

Payment for Independent Council Members

The Question of payment of Council Members was raised. All independent members would be expected to serve on a pro bono basis.

No payment now or in the future would be countenanced.

A major topic that was discussed at every meeting was how to ensure as many Brethren as possible had the opportunity to vote.

The current electronic online options are considered as significant improvement on just 15 years ago when only those who were of the rank of Junior Warden or above and who had to physically attend the Quarterly Communication in person to cast a vote.

Significantly, today every financial member of a Lodge under the jurisdiction of Freemasons Victoria has the power to vote and using electronic facilities does not have to physically attend the Quarterly Communication.

In summary, the sessions were enthusiastically received as a necessary precursor to the preparation of more detailed information on proposed changes.

This information will be made available during November to enable discussion, feedback, and amendment prior to the proposed Notice of Motion on the governance changes to be given in December and voted on at a Quarterly Communication in late February/early March 2023.

Brethren, the opportunity get out and meet was a valuable and worthwhile process that ensured significant communication.

I trust that these roadshows can occur more regularly to ensure Freemasons are heard and valuable ideas are discussed and debated in an open and transparent manner.

Constitutional Reform

The need for Constitutional reform has been apparent for several years and considerable work has been done towards constitutional reform.

Some urgency was prompted by The Ethics Centre Report of December 2020 and the Members' resolution at the September 2021 Quarterly Communication for the trial of a split of the Board of General Purposes into two councils.

The Book of Constitutions in its present form is comprehensive, but difficult to use. It can and should be simplified and user-friendly.

Specific reforms are needed for the separation of the responsibilities of the former Board of General Purposes into Commercial Council and Masonic Council and an overarching governing body.

Separation of core or constitutional provisions is needed from regulations, governance policies and procedures.

Regarding the Commercial Council, which deals with business and property matters only, a simple and user-friendly version of the Constitution is desirable.

Regarding the Masonic Council, which deals with all matters other than business and property, the provisions of the Book of Constitutions can be streamlined and simplified, making it more accessible, useful, and fraternally friendly.

The Constitution Transition Team



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