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REPORT OF THE STRATEGY REVIEW SUB-COMMITTEE

A sub-committee of the Liberty Victoria Committee met on a number of occasions during 2009 to formulate a long-term strategy plan for Liberty. The sub-committee comprised Michael Pearce (President), Anne O'Rourke (Vice-President), Evelyn Tadros (committee member) and Alex Krummel (Office Manager).

The sub-committee was assisted by outside consultants Bill Haebich, Michael Cohn and Angela Tidmarsh. A half-day “workshop” was conducted in October facilitated by Vicki Davidson of Quest Consulting. The contribution of these outside consultants has been invaluable and the sub-committee would like to record its debt to them.

As a result of the half-day workshop, and the collaborative work done preparatory to it, the outside consultants prepared a detailed strategic plan. It is attached. The Liberty sub-committee has endorsed that plan and recommends it for adoption by the Committee to guide it in the development of the organisation over the next five years.

In this report, the sub-committee wishes to highlight certain aspects of the strategic plan and set goals for the next year. The matters dealt with here are:

1. Focus on core activity.
2. Re-organisation.
3. Extending collaborations.
4. Membership.
5. Volunteers.

1. Core activity

The sub-committee identified the primary or core activity of Liberty Victoria as making submissions, both in writing and orally, to parliamentary and other public inquiries. This is the thing that Liberty does best and where it has most influence. Liberty's ability to influence public debate largely derives from the seriousness with which its submissions are taken.

It is true that Liberty's public profile derives largely from public comments on topical matters in the mass media. However, this exposure is attributable mainly to the credibility it has earned from the less high profile, but more influential, work it does in making submissions to parliamentary and other public inquiries.

The sub-committee therefore recommends that this be the focus of Liberty's activities and its priority in resource allocation. The other objectives set out in this report are all seen as in furtherance of this prime objective.

This does not mean that Liberty will not engage in other activities but in rationing its limited resources it should try to ensure that this is its number one priority.

2. Re-organisation

Largely to enable it to focus better on its core activity, but also to improve its capacity in other areas, Liberty should re-organise its structures in the manner set out in Part 3 of the strategy plan.

There was general agreement among members of the sub-committee and the outside consultants that the current structure does not work very well. Under the current structure, the Executive tends to get sidetracked into policy work and the Committee side-tracked into management work, with the result that neither fulfills its function very well.

There was considerable debate with the outside consultants about an appropriate alternative structure. They supported the structure described in the strategy plan at p 9. However, they accepted that it may be too ambitious for Liberty as it is currently constituted and should be regarded as a longer term goal. Page 10 of the strategy plan contains an interim structure which is a kind of “half-way house” between the current structure and the proposed future structure.

Essentially the interim structure involves spinning out of the current committee the policy work into an expanded body to be known as the “Policy Committee”. It will comprise up to 20 people and be concerned solely with policy and, in particular, with submissions.

The old committee will then be pared down to an executive or management committee but with certain extra positions, namely fundraiser, membership secretary, event organiser and media manager. Most of these positions are self-explanatory, with the possible exception of “media manager” which is intended to cover also maintenance of the web-site and production of newsletters.

Unlike the current structure, not all members of the management committee will be members of the policy committee. The members of both bodies will be the President, Secretary, Immediate Past President and Senior Vice-President (a new position intended to be filled by the person in line to succeed the President). This overlap should ensure that each body will be sufficiently well informed about what the other is doing. The management committee positions which do not overlap with the policy committee are those solely concerned with management and organisational matters.

The thrust of this re-organisation is to enable the policy committee to focus exclusively on policy matters and especially to devote its resources to submission writing and presentation.

This re-organisation would require constitutional amendments. It is envisaged they would be put to an extraordinary general meeting in the course of the year and, if passed, the new structure would be implemented at the end of the year.

It goes without saying that the success of this proposed structure will depend very much on identifying the right people for the key positions.

3. Collaborations

The sub-committee also identified collaboration as another way in which Liberty can be more effective. There are a number of other organisations with similar objectives to Liberty but which are seen as collaborators, rather than competitors. Both Liberty and these other organisations can benefit from sharing resources and expertise and avoiding unnecessary duplication. There is therefore much to be gained from collaborating with them.

We have seen a measure of that in 2009 with Rachel Ball's contribution on the committee. That contribution enabled us to collaborate effectively with the Human Rights Law Resource Centre by presenting joint submissions or endorsing submissions of the other organisation.

The proposal is to extend that model of collaboration to other like-minded organisations. The sub-committee has identified these bodies as potential collaborators:

- The Castan Centre
- Amnesty International
- The Criminal Bar Association
- Law Institute of Victoria
- Human Rights Arts and Film Festival

This list is not exhaustive and should be kept constantly under review.

It is proposed that each of these bodies be invited to nominate a person for co-option to our policy committee. It would then be expected that, by having people from collaborator organisations on the policy committee, we will be better able to identify areas for collaboration and resource-sharing.

The New South Wales and Queensland Civil Liberties Councils were also identified as collaborators. However, it is not yet practical to invite them to nominate members to the policy committee. Effective means off collaboration with these organisations, including via a national body, should be the subject of further separate consideration.

5. Membership

There is no doubt that one of Liberty's greatest failings is its inability to derive more benefit from its membership. This reflects in large measure its failure to offer much to members except the warm inner glow of paying for membership and one or two events a year for members to attend.

This failing is reflected in the very high turnover of members. For example, we have estimated that over the last two membership years approximately 250 people have not renewed their memberships. This is a staggering figure when you consider that our total current membership is about 275. If we could stop half this "churn" of membership each year we could easily reach 500 members in a couple of years.

The sub-committee proposes to address this problem in two ways. First, we propose a membership secretary for the new management committee, who will be responsible for all membership matters, especially encouraging members to renew. Secondly, we propose a special membership project with outside consultants to help us to identify ways we can offer more to, and get more out of, our members.

We have not yet identified the outside consultants but have some leads and are hopeful that we will be able to set up a specific project as proposed.

6. Volunteers

Many of the things just said about members could also be said about volunteers: high churn, failure to offer them much and failure to get much out of them. Accordingly, we also propose a specific project with outside consultants to see if we cannot improve our use of this resource.

7. Future action

This report does not intend to deal exhaustively with all the matters covered in the strategy plan. It has focused on the most pressing parts of the plan which can realistically be achieved over the next 12 months.

The sub-committee therefore proposes that at the end of each of the following four years a strategic review sub-committee be formed, whose task it will be to return to the strategy plan and select for the next year the items which should be the subject of consideration. That sub-committee should also be charged with reporting at the beginning of each year on the progress made over the preceding year in implementing the strategy review objectives.

Michael Pearce

Anne O'Rourke

Evelyn Tadros

Alex Krummel

5 February 2010