



## **President's Report – 2015 AGM**

The past year has been dominated by the illness and eventual passing of Simon Auty and it has deeply affected the association and some individuals in ways we could not have imagined.

Simon chaired our last AGM in the knowledge that he had a potentially terminal condition, but he determined to continue in the role while managing a transition of his responsibilities as President and Treasurer to other members of the executive. Samantha Auty joined the executive at that time and directors who would otherwise have stood down, continued on in support of Simon. Those plans to transition from Simon's leadership were prematurely cut short when Simon died unexpectedly in London on 2 October 2014.

When I was appointed President on 2 December, I advised Council that we were having difficulties recovering the financial records of the association from Simon's home and his computer. Our efforts to recover and reconstruct the accounts of the association began with the recovery of Simon's computer on 14 December, but have only just concluded in recent days.

### **Our work during this time has revealed the following;**

1. The \$194,000 donation from an anonymous benefactor that Simon announced to the members on 21 June 2014 was in fact a personal donation from Simon. He went to some effort to ensure that no member of the executive was aware of the source of the donation and he personally applied the funds to discharge FV's NAB loan facility
2. FV financial records subsequent to FY2010 were either missing, incomplete or inaccurate. Statements presented to the Executive, Council and AGM's from 2011 were inaccurate and/or not supported by proper accounts
3. A number of transactions (at least 15) were found between FV accounts and what we now know to be Simon's personal account. These were not identified as such and we cannot explain why these transactions took place. The net result of these transactions is an excess of approximately \$20,000 in favour of FV.

**The current status of these matters is;**

1. We have appointed an accounting firm, LSA Partners to restore our financial records to good order. They have completed the 2014 financial statements in the appropriate format, including all necessary notes to the accounts to rectify any previous material differences. These accounts have been independently reviewed by W.A. Nutton & Associates and they are now presented to the members at this AGM.
2. Consumer Affairs Victoria has advised that regarding our returns, all obligations will be fully satisfied when we submit the annual statements for 2011 and 2014 and resubmit corrected returns for 2012 and 2013. This will be completed immediately after these accounts are presented to the AGM.

**Other actions taken to strengthen the governance of the association are;**

- Appointment of an external professional book-keeping service to manage the BAS requirements and provide monthly oversight of the bank activity and reconciliation
- Adoption of a cloud-based accounting platform with designated role-based access available to multiple users
- A requirement for two Directors to authorise all disbursements
- Appointment of an external auditor who will be available to meet annually with the whole Executive to provide review assurance and discuss the financial statements
- Splitting of the roles of President and Treasurer from the 2015 AGM
- Mandatory participation for Executive in online AICD Director training modules covering the roles, duties and responsibilities in governance for not-for-profit organisations

I can report that FV has never been in a stronger financial position. While we cannot explain many of Simon's actions and we must address issues relating to governance, the current position of just over \$70,000 in cash and zero debt could not have been contemplated without Simon's generosity

It should also be recorded that from the time concerns regarding Simon's management of the accounts were identified, Samantha Auty has stood aside from all meetings, discussions and decisions relating to these matters.

**Claim from the estate of Simon Auty**

Sadly, we must also record the receipt of a letter on 21 March from lawyers acting on behalf of Simon Auty's estate. In this letter, FV was requested to consider repaying Simon's donation of \$194,000 and to provide further details to explain one of the other transactions previously noted.

This is not a letter of demand, nor does it claim wrongdoing on the part of FV, or threaten legal action. Our own legal advice is that there are no valid grounds for any such claim. We have responded to the letter and declined the request to return the donation. We have undertaken to provide any further detail on the other transactions if that were to become available.

Simon was very clear on many occasions and over several months in stating his intentions for this donation. We are grateful for his generosity and we respect his wishes regarding the use of the funds.

### **Membership**

Fencing Victoria closed 2014 with 747 affiliated members across all categories. This is up from 629 in 2013, and largely reflects the growth in the Club/School membership base reflected in the increased Schools League participation. As of 26 May 2015, there are 226 individual members of Fencing Victoria across 17 clubs. This does not include the Associate or Club/School fencers who are the backbone of many these clubs and of all school based clubs. Together these add another 428 fencers, bringing a total membership of 654. Compared to 2014, this is down – but I have no doubt that the extra 94 needed to beat last year's jumbo "747" number will trickle in between now and Open National Championships in December. Regardless, this is a significant number of people who identify as fencers and deserve our full support.

### **Coaching and Club Development**

In February, I reported that there were early indications that 2 (possibly 3) new fencing clubs were preparing to affiliate with Fencing Victoria. I am pleased to report that one of these prospective clubs have finalised the requirements for registration with Consumer Affairs Victoria and have affiliated with Fencing Victoria. We welcome Touche Fencing Club Inc to Fencing Victoria and look forward to your development. Work is continuing to support the inquiries from a potential Sabre-focussed club to be based in the Eastern suburbs, and an ongoing aim is to increase the representation of Fencing Victoria on the "other" side of the West Gate Bridge.

Coaching development is ably guided by Pieter Leeuwenburgh and I would like to record the gratitude of the Executive for his role in the growth in coaching numbers seen recently. Currently, 9 people are mid-way through their Level 1 Coaching Course, heading towards their assessment date of 19 July. Neil Hick is to be commended for the delivery, assessment and invaluable tutelage given to these 9 and, as an association; we will reap the benefits as these coaches expand their skills and develop yet more fencers in our sport.

### **Competitions**

On any given weekend, and increasingly on Friday nights, you will find the State Fencing Centre a hubbub of activity and apparent chaos, all eloquently managed by Sam Auty. It cannot be underestimated how vital a Competitions Manager of Sam's calibre is to the actual expression of what Fencing Victoria is about. Special mention must be made of the Schools League, where Tableau of 128 DEs are regularly seen – an unimaginable number just a couple of years ago. It is at these state and school league events that match skills are honed, nerves overcome and results (both good and bad) are digested and added to the "memory banks" that allows the fencers of Victoria to compete on a National and International stage.

And compete they have. And win they have too. The list of current National Champions from Victoria is impressive, and covers all age groups;

<b><u>Open</u></b>		<b><u>U23</u></b>	
Ned Fitzgerald	Mens Foil	Helen Phillips	Womens Sabre
Seamus Robinson	Mens Epee	Diana Sher	Womens Epee (2015)
Sam Auty	Womens Sabre		
	Womens Epee Team		
	Mens Foil Team		
<b><u>Junior</u></b>		<b><u>Cadet</u></b>	
Lucas Webber	Mens Foil	Ned Fitzgerald	Mens Foil
Ned Fitzgerald	Mens Epee	Ned Fitzgerald	Mens Epee
	Mens Epee Team	Helen Phillips	Womens Sabre
<b><u>U15</u></b>			Mens Epee Team
Noah Whiffin	Mens Foil		Mens Foil Team
Orla Mundy	Womens Epee		Womens Sabre Team
	Mens Foil Team		

Internationally, our presence is being felt. I will not attempt to list all the achievements or name individual fencers as I am certain to leave someone out. However, the countries and regions which have not hosted Victorians in a competitive or training environment are few. With 2015 being the Olympic qualifying season, the competition has intensified and we are less than 1 month from the next big event on the international stage, Asian Senior Championships in Singapore. World Championships in Moscow follow and Fencing Victoria has much to be proud of in having representatives in Men and Womens Epee and Foil. I'll repeat a plug made in my February report, that for the great development on the AFF website which is the "Australians Fencing Overseas" page. This takes feeds directly from the FIE and EFC entry portals to identify which Australians are where in the world, flying the flag and hopefully the blue oval with "V'd" weapons of Fencing Victoria. I encourage you to visit the site at <http://bit.ly/1zFHCMe> to keep up to date.

### **Constitution**

We had hoped to present members with a new constitution for the association at this AGM, but the matters previously raised have been the over-riding focus of the Executive and Council in recent months.

A new draft constitution, based on the model rules has been drafted and is all but ready for distribution and comment from members and clubs. This consultation process, final drafting and presentation to the members for voting will be a matter for the incoming committee.

### **In conclusion**

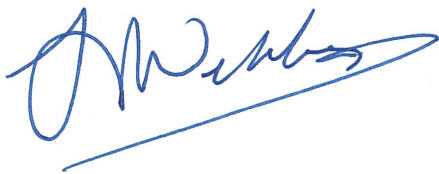
It has been a year of highs and lows. I would like to thank the Executive for an extraordinary effort through difficult times. None should be singled out, but I must acknowledge Sam Auty's efforts in managing a heavy competition schedule for FV through the toughest possible time for her personally.

To Robyn, Kayt, Grant and Sam, I wish to convey my thanks for your support and to acknowledge the spirit of cooperation and dedication that has carried us all through the turmoil of 2014.

This will be a better year. I trust the challenges we faced are behind us and that FV will be stronger for the experience.

The Executive team and I wish all clubs and fencers success in the continuing season.

I submit this report to the members for your consideration

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Geoff Webber', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Geoff Webber

27 May 2015

