

**LARGER ROTARY DISTRICTS – AN EXCITING PLATFORM FOR CHANGE!
MOVING FORWARD TOGETHER
TO RE-INVIGORATE CLUBS AND MAKE ROTARY FLOURISH FOR ANOTHER 100 YEARS**

Dear Fellow Rotarians,

After almost 100 years of successful operation in Australia and New Zealand, Rotary finds itself at a very significant cross road. With a declining membership over the last ten years, Australia has lost 4,314 members (13%) and New Zealand has lost 1,967 (19%) plus an ageing membership demographic, the continued existence of Rotary as we know it is under considerable threat.

Do we remain doing what we are currently doing and find we no longer exist in 20 years OR do we acknowledge we have a problem and accept the challenge to work together to address the issues and make the changes necessary to take Rotary forward for another hundred years? It is both a challenging and an exciting time for Rotary in this part of the world.

There is an urgent need for change both at the Club and the District levels. Clubs need to find new ways of attracting and retaining members and Districts need to focus their efforts on providing the best possible support mechanisms to Clubs in their crucial endeavour to grow and strengthen Rotary. Larger and better resourced Districts are seen as a significant way of providing this support to Clubs.

In recent weeks I have had the pleasure of working with a 'Task Force' of dedicated Rotarians from all levels of service to discuss urgent planning and action required to reverse the serious downward trend in membership across all 27 Districts in Zone 7B and 8 – and discuss how we can all move forward with confidence that Rotary will flourish for another 100 years.

The task force included grass roots Rotarians, club presidents, Governors Nominee, Governors Elect, Past Governors and RI staff – male and female and of a variety of ages.

I am delighted to report a wonderful spirit and commitment during the two days and there was general agreement that I now had to share the same positive message with you all – as we move forward together.

Be very certain that this message is NOT just about re-Districting. Re-Districting is only one of the suite of changes needed to revitalise Rotary 'down under'.

We all agreed that ONLY Rotary Clubs can turn around the current alarming membership challenge confronting Rotary in the western world. However, for this to happen, the administration of Rotary at District level has to change dramatically to provide Clubs with the support they need to address this challenge.

The meeting acknowledged that the age of 'Larger Districts' has arrived – and that these larger, more resourced and more support focused Districts will start to happen from 1st July 2020.

Planning is already well advanced for the merger of Districts 9700 and 9710 in central west and southern NSW along with Districts 9500 and 9520 in South Australia. Senior leaders are considering various options in WA, Victoria and northern Australia, along with southern Queensland and northern NSW.

Similar discussions are taking place in New Zealand where a meeting is planned for early March to discuss re-Districting options in that country.

The Task Force concluded that new **LARGER DISTRICTS provide a great opportunity** for:

- Developing a flatter, more streamlined District administration with access to a greater number of resources to better support clubs, including the possibility of having a paid administrator/CEO to lead the business team and enable cost efficiencies;
- Decluttering the role of the District Governor and increase focus more on strategic leadership thereby enabling the possibility of attracting working/younger Rotarians taking up the Governor role;
- Strengthening the role of the Assistant Governor by giving them the training and resources to provide direct support to clubs and turning them into Area Governors with a maximum of 15 clubs each;
- Making better use of technology for more regular communication within the District and between Clubs and the provision of a wider range of training and support activities;
- Utilising economies of scale to employ professional facilitators/resources to help Clubs;
- Dissemination of a clearer 'national and state voice' for Rotary and improve the public image of Rotary;
- Attracting national corporate sponsorship and the possibility to employ a national fund raiser to support and fund the business model.

The Task Force was adamant that such sweeping District changes must not only encourage but also support genuine change within Rotary clubs; it also acknowledged that changes may generate **increasing levels of anxiety within Clubs**, which is an understandable reaction as things held in high regard for years start to change.

However, the important thing to remember as we strive to continue as a vibrant, community focused service organisation, is that **some things must never change**; these include our Objects, Values and Ethics (4 Way Test), as well as our desire to serve others and to enjoy fellowship.

Consequently, for Club leaders to affect meaningful change within their Clubs they will need to appreciate and accept that Rotary has a problem that needs to be addressed and in so doing, they have an **exciting opportunity** to:

- Play an active role in changing Rotary to enable it to flourish for at least another hundred years;
- Re-invigorate their Club with targeted and customised support from the District so they promote and market Rotary in a variety of new ways to attract and retain members;
- Enhance and strengthen community and vocational service;
- Promote the new flexibility in Rotary and utilise the new resources available;
- Work together with other Clubs in different ways or networks that retain individuality and treasured elements but capitalise on the advantages of a larger cohort of members;
- Establish strategic partnerships with local entities and organisations.

The Task Force also considered how Districts and Clubs could work together to:

- Make Rotary membership more physically and financially accessible by developing innovative ways of engagement for a wider variety of cultural and special interest groups;
- Turn the focus from fundraising to service and provide Rotarians with more hands-on ways to serve. I leave you with the new RI Vision Statement ... ***"Together we see a world where people unite and take action to create lasting change - across the globe, in our communities, and in ourselves"***

Noel Trevaskis, RI Director 2016-2018