



# GLIDING AUSTRALIA

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## **PRESIDENT'S REPORT**

### **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING – 24<sup>th</sup> SEPTEMBER 2021**

#### **Reflection**

The past 12 months have been a very challenging period for all of us. COVID-19 has added a level of complexity to our lives that not even the most clairvoyant of social and economic commentators could have predicted. The effects of lockdowns have been unprecedented and far reaching. Just when we think we see a glimmer of light at the end of the tunnel it all turns upside down with more lockdowns. There is no doubt we will get through this and I think we need to be positive about that; it's just the process and timing of how that might happen that creates enormous uncertainty and consequential stress. One day, hopefully sooner rather than later, we will get back to business as usual.

The Board's method of doing business has similarly been anything but usual. It's now been about 18 months since we've been able to have a face-to-face meeting and we've all become very accustomed to video conferencing. There's been a lot happening within the Board and GFA's management team, so allow me to share some of that with you.

#### **Part 149**

Deliberations around the subject of Part 149 have been prominent. You may recall that late last year the Board took the view that we needed to progress down a path that would pave the way for GFA's adoption of Part 149 and just recently the Board has ratified that view by committing to becoming a Part 149 Approved Self-Administering Aviation Organisation (ASAO). Part 149 is legislation that was enacted in 2018 and it lays out the rules around how aviation sporting organisations like GFA can become self-administering. ASAOs will have greater autonomy over their whole of business operations, but with these enhanced freedoms comes added responsibilities. We will need to establish effective self-auditing and change management processes that identify risk and safety as core elements, and of course, as happens now, we will be audited by the regulator (CASA) to ensure our compliance. The requirements around this are quite complex and are specified in the Part 149 Manual of Standards (MOS). Although we are well down the track of developing our suite of documentation there remains a lot of work to be done and once completed it will be submitted to CASA in the form of an Exposition. Our fully developed Exposition will need to be presented to CASA before the end of this calendar year. Although there are many people involved in this process, I would like to acknowledge Anthony Smith as the lead of our Part 149 Committee and Drew McKinnie who is playing an overarching pivotal role in the area of safety.

It is not expected that members will see any real, direct impact as a result of adopting Part 149. The changes are more related to management and how accountability is attributed – the adoption of Part 149 will result in a better, stronger organisation. Part 149 will mean change; it is a challenging process and I strongly believe that provided we develop our Exposition such that it serves the best interests of GFA, it will be a great thing by helping to ensure our future sustainability.

Our Articles of Association will need updating to accommodate some significant changes to our management structure associated with the adoption of Part 149. We will need to enshrine the roles of an Accountable Manager and Safety Manager within our management structure along with operations and airworthiness personnel.

### **Constitutional Reform**

Over the past year the Board has been considering some additional changes to the Articles that will assist in improving the effectiveness of the Board. The GFA Board currently comprises the Regional Representatives whose job it is to represent members via their respective Regional Associations. Also sitting on the Board is a Juniors' Representative and the Executive team comprising the President, Vice Presidents, Treasurer, Secretary, Executive Officer, Safety Manager and Heads of Departments. In all, a total of 17 people – way too many for effective and efficient decision making. It's interesting to note that BHP has 13 Directors on its Board. At its last meeting the GFA Board considered a paper that proposed to split the current Board into two distinct groups, the Board being responsible for policy and governance and the Executive having responsibility for policy implementation and running the day-to-day activities of the GFA. If the Board recommendations are approved by GFA members these changes will see a clear "separation of powers". There are several less significant matters within the Articles that also require attention. A communication package is currently being prepared for dissemination to all members that will clearly outline the Board's initiative. There will be ample opportunity for member feedback prior to an Extraordinary General Meeting planned for later in the year when members will be asked to support the proposal.

### **Our IT Systems**

An area that has generated some angst from members is the interface between members and the GFA's IT system. To help identify and address these issues the Board created a new executive position, namely Chief Experience Officer. I have previously communicated that we are working towards improvements and some have been already implemented. Tim Shirley has been our Mr Fixit man when it comes to IT matters and has done a great job over the years – thank you Tim. Effective this month, Tim has decided to retire. The GFA has now engaged three GFA members as paid, casual, part-time workers to fill the gap – Tim should feel proud that it will take three people to fill his shoes. This arrangement will provide the GFA with an excellent IT support team with a wide diversity of skills and experience. Our IT systems are functional, but the user experience has been somewhat challenging. I'm confident, that over time, we will see significant improvements in this important area.

## **Marketing and Development**

There have been some significant changes in our approach to marketing and development. Over the past few years s2f has provided a real focus and enabled us to identify a number of shortcomings – the slogan adopted by Mandy Temple of, standardise, modernise and prioritise which should remain as a constant reminder of how we should be moving forward. During this year the Board decided to merge the s2f program into our Marketing and Development Department as business-as-usual, under the leadership of Sarah Thompson. Mandy will continue her great work as part of this very progressive group.

## **Integrated Training Program**

S2f identified a real problem for members new to our sport where a clear pathway to progression beyond flying solo was not readily evident. We have done a great job of training pilots to be safe and competent in the circuit area, but there are real gaps with providing formal training support beyond that point. The bottom line is that we have been losing members. All members would be aware of the collaborative work that has been done by the Operations and Soaring Development Departments to address this problem with the development of the Integrated Training Program (ITP). The ITP will provide a clear, continuous and integrated pathway from first flight to Glider Pilot Certificate standard. At that point, glider pilots can be confident that they have the necessary training and skills where they can independently expand their flying activities to leave the circuit area and beyond and discover the real joys of soaring. There is still some last-minute fine tuning to be completed prior to the formal launch of the program later this year. The ITP team has worked hard to develop this initiative and our sport will benefit greatly from it – they all deserve our thanks.

## **Financial Matters**

I'm sure all sporting organisations have experienced significant financial challenges over the past 12 months and GFA is no exception. Government financial support initiatives have really underpinned the GFA's financial performance along with our prior strong financial position. Consequently, the Board was able to assist our members in the form of a six month membership extension. It is most unlikely that we will see further government assistance of this magnitude.

Until August 2018 the GFA's accumulated reserves were held in Bank Term deposits which by then were yielding close to zero return. Then, in order to achieve a better return, the Board resolved to adopt an investment strategy that spread the funds across fixed interest and mortgage securities, property and property managers and Australian and International shares and appointed an internal Investment Committee to manage the investments. To the end of the last financial year this has yielded an annualised return of 10.5%.

To ensure ongoing professionalism in the management of members funds the Board, after a competitive process, has recently appointed a professional asset manager, FMD Financial Services, to advise us on continuing investments. The Investment Committee will closely monitor performance of the fund manager.

## **Airspace**

Access to airspace is to gliding as sea is to ships – we can't stay "afloat" without it. Earlier this year Airservices Australia (AsA) proposed a major airspace reform that would have seen a significant lowering of Class E airspace along Australia's eastern seaboard. If this were to occur the result would be extremely damaging to our sport and to most VFR operators. AsA received submissions from many stakeholders, including GFA, rejecting their proposal and they are currently evaluating those submissions. It's unlikely that the people that are pushing these reforms will go away, so we need to be vigilant and advocate strongly to preserve our access to this airspace. Similarly, we are currently working with CASA to ensure our continued access to Class A airspace.

## **Closing Comment**

For me, the past year, my first as President, has been an incredibly steep learning curve. It has been challenging and sometimes frustrating, but I have really enjoyed the role. I would like to thank my fellow Board members, all volunteers, who have provided fantastic support and guidance, as well as our employees – a great group of people who really do have gliding running through their veins. I am hopeful that current travel restrictions will be lifted soon and that we'll all be able to get back to actively participating in the sport we love. I also look forward to the opportunity of being able to travel so that I can meet and exchange ideas directly with members.

Fly safe and be kind to each other.

**Steve Pegler,**  
**President.**