



Presidents Podium

Volume 1 Issue 4

24 August 2009

Association of Independent Retirees Western Australia Division

Web based News sheet



W.A. Division President Don Keene

Photo courtesy of Mandurah Coastal Times

Greetings Everybody

Here is a summary of the topics that were discussed at meeting of the board of directors of the Association held in Melbourne on August 10 and 11.

AIR Secretariat

The Secretariat has agreed to continue the existing contract it has with the Association for a further period of 12 months from 31 August, subject to increases in accordance with CPI. The contract has two components, firstly an amount to cover defined tasks such as matters to do with membership, the data base, membership renewals, membership enquiries, finance, ensuring the company meets its statutory requirements, taking minutes and so on. There is an additional payment made on an hourly rate for additional services provided as required.

You will note from Annual Reports that the cost to AIR is of the order of \$100000 per annum. To uncritical eyes this may seem to be a substantial amount of money. However it should be recognized that AIR does not have and can't afford a paid Executive Officer and the Secretariat ipso facto carries out this function, and as it has been in place for some years, it has very valuable Corporate memory.

Finance and the ANZ Visa Card

Negotiations are continuing with the bank and it is hoped that a card will be launched at the AGM in November. In general, the Associations finances are a matter of some concern. While the balance sheet shows that there is a healthy excess of assets over liabilities, there has been a relatively small budget deficit for 2008-2009. The provisional 2009-2010 budget reveals that if some corrective action is not taken the deficit will be considerably larger. The Board has decided that it will not provide travel subsidies to attend the AGM in future.

Retirement Income Policy

The Board has agreed that a Policy be adopted for future AIR submissions that in principle it should be made possible for all future retirees to fund the whole period of their retirement. It was further agreed that AIR agrees in principle to the raising of the qualifying period of the age pension to 67.

Email Protocol

The recent WA Division paper on the protocol to be used was adopted as Policy of the Association.

2010-2011 Pre Budget Submission

All submissions from Divisions must be received by mid September. Your President will be assisting in the preparation of AIR's submission.

Membership

It was disappointing to report that 10 Branches had closed over the last 2 years. While many members had joined other branches, the number of new members was less than the rate of attrition. The March for membership drive will be repeated next year (at least in WA).

Independent Retiree Magazine

A call for expressions of Interest will be called very shortly for a new publisher as Zebra Publishing has indicated it will not continue after December 2009.

Maureen Kingston Membership Award

Branches wishing to nominate must do so by 30 September. The trophy will be awarded to the Branch that achieves the highest percentage increase in new members for the last financial year.

Board Restructure

There was prolonged discussion at the meeting and decisions taken have been fully publicized elsewhere.

The National President Theresa Kot has started a question and answer section about the restructure on the website.

Have a look or add your queries to the list.

News from Tom Rollo

Thank you for electing me at the August AGM.

Unfortunately I was recovering from a recent ear operation and had to leave the meeting when I had an imbalance problem. That is now resolved and we are 'back in business'

As a member of the Seniors Ministerial Advisory Council (SMAC) I am involved in many facets of Seniors activities. These go beyond the general parameters of AIR but most of them affect some of our members at some stage in their retirement.

SMAC Activities to Date

We have had two meetings and I have been asked to give feedback on issues such as the Country Fuel card, Elder Abuse, Seniors 'still putting in' and the upcoming Advanced Health Directive and Enduring Power of Guardianship (Living Wills)

The government officers dealing with each of these came to the meetings and briefed us on the details.

Follow up Items

Fuel Card

This is a \$500 preloaded card issued to Country pensioners for purchasing fuel or taxi fares. The theory is that they do not enjoy cheap/free transport like their metropolitan counterparts.

We circulated a summary of the scheme to all country branches requesting feedback on the operation etc.

From the information received, we have forwarded 4 issues to the Royalties for Regions review board for their consideration. The major issue we raised is that Seniors card holders in Perth get cheap/free transport but only pensioners in the country are eligible for the fuel card.

We have been advised that the review will be held on 1st Sept and the points we raised will be considered.

Elder Abuse

What is to do with AIR I hear you ask. However this is not just Granny bashing. It is physical, mental and Financial exploitation (unfortunately mainly by children and their spouses). How often do we hear of retirees putting money into properties owned by their children then becoming homeless? What about the daughter in law who is an angel on Skype & correspondence but is a tyrant to live with?

Whilst we as a group cannot do anything to rectify such situations. We can help by making retirees aware of the various risks involved. A document is being prepared to assist with this.

Advance Health Planning

In a briefing by a lawyer from the Public Advocate office we learned that we are now legally able to determine, in advance, our wish in regard to the use of life support etc. This very complex issue has been dealt with and approved by State Parliament and currently the documentation for public use (agreement forms etc) are being prepared..

For detailed information or a speaker to come to your meeting contact Debra Casey at the Office of the Public Advocate 9278 7300 www.publicadvocate.wa.gov.au

Seniors Card Review

This long awaited review is nearing completion and we are hopeful that we can have some input into it prior to release.

Still Putting In

This is a look at the amount of work and services carried out by seniors as volunteers. It is obvious that many self help establishments such as Silver chain, CAB & all the charitable bodies could not operate without our help. This gives us a platform to show our worth to the community.

In General

The SMAC is an excellent forum to get our views across to Government as we deal with the government officers from the relevant department as well as the Minister. I believe that once the officers are on your side you are nearly there. Politicians (particularly in opposition) tend to offer the world give massive compliments on your approach or documentation, then do very little to assist your cause.

Other Issues

Concessions for Seniors

Prior to being elected to the division, I was responsible within PNS branch for the regular updating of the sheet detailing available concession for the various cards. I intend to continue this and the next update will include the new benefits that are effective in September. This document is posted on WA Division webpage.

Commonwealth Seniors Health Card.

I have a concern that this card has been devalued in the eyes of the politicians and we will face a struggle keeping our hard fought for entitlements.

This is based on the fact that since Tax was abolished from non government Super in 2007. Financial advisors have had a field day organising clients portfolios to ensure that they obtain this card. This coupled with the fact that people were allowed to place \$1m tax free into super for that year has made a mockery of the income limits. That \$1m can be withdrawn tax free as a total or in part with no threat to the owner losing the card.

Currently, salary sacrifice amounts are exempt in regard to the card. It seems to have been overlooked that prior to 2007 ALL income was counted as taxable and had to be declared on application for a card.

Last year the government made an attempt at rectifying this and not surprisingly failed as we at AIR canvassed strongly against the change.

The government is in a bind on this as they are losing tax money through salary sacrificing (albeit they have limited the yearly amount) and paying more welfare allowances than they have budgeted for.

Some of the recent rhetoric being used by the pollies refer to fixing up 'middle class welfare'. This primarily is referring to high income earners receiving baby bonus and the like.

How soon will it be until this logic is applied to the wealthier CHSC recipients?

In the meantime I doubt if we will get any joy in near future applications for additional benefits, or an increase to the eligibility amount. A recent survey shows that currently there are 5 taxpayers for every retiree and in 10 years that is expected to drop to 3.

We fare reasonably well in respect to our benefits and it is important that these are not diminished.

We need to frame our pre-budget submissions this year with care to ensure that we do not compromise our current entitlements.

DISCLAIMER

The Association of Independent Retirees (A.I.R.) Limited, Board of Directors, State Division and the management of WA Division, provide this information in good faith for the assistance of members and has been sourced from other organisations. A.I.R. do not warrant the accuracy of the information provided. A.I.R. does not accept any liability for the results of actions taken or not taken on the basis of the supplied information