

NATIONAL FINCH and SOFTBILL ASSOCIATION

Minutes of inaugural meeting held at Martinsville, NSW on Saturday, 14th October, 2006.

On Saturday, 14th October, 2006 forty-six finch fanciers from New South Wales, Western Australia and Queensland gathered at Mike Fidler's property at Martinsville, NSW, for the expressed purpose of forming a national finch body in Australia.

Representatives from specialist finch and general avicultural societies in New South Wales and Western Australia were in attendance.

Avicultural organisations represented included:

- ***Finch Society of Australia*** (Doug Hill - Sydney, John Butler – Hunter, Jim Clark - Hawkesbury)
- ***Finch Society of Western Australia*** (Arthur Orford)
- ***Riverina Finch Society*** (David Holmes)
- ***Manly Warringah Avicultural Club*** (Ron, Robertson, Clive McAuley, Bob Barnes)
- ***Taree & District Canary & Finch Society*** (Craig Greenaway, Mark Minett)
- ***NSW Finch Exhibitors Society*** (Keith Edwards, Bruce Hockley)
- ***Zebra Finch Society of Australia*** (Bruce Hockley, Bob Carrett)
- ***Lake Macquarie Zebra Finch Society*** (Gilbert Bunn, Bruce Whiting)
- ***Hunter District Canary & Cage Bird Society*** (Graham Downing, Steven Edwards)

- ***Canary and Cage Bird Federation of Australia*** (Ron Robertson)
- ***Associated Birdkeepers of Australia*** (Barbara Devnie, Norm Bennett)
- ***Avicultural Federation of Australia*** (Arthur Orford)

Apologies were received from:

- Betty Naylor, Orange, NSW - *Association of Country Bird Exhibitors*
- Ian Todhunter, Dubbo NSW - *Orana Avicultural Society*
- Marcus Pollard, Tasmania
- Ian Ward - *Avicultural Society of NSW*
- *Canary and Cage Bird Federation of Australia*

Nick Gascoigne, from the federal *Department of Environment and Heritage*, was invited to attend to discuss and answer questions about the role of the *Exotic Bird Advisory Group* (EBAG) and the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act)

The meeting opened at 10.30am with Mike Fidler in the chair. Mike extended a warm welcome to those in attendance and reiterated the purpose and aims of the meeting as outlined in the printed agenda sheet and discussion paper.

The outlines of broad aims and objectives for the proposed national finch body were read and discussed as outlined in the printed agenda sheet. Following much discussion, rewording and refinement, the following were finalised and accepted by the meeting.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- To provide a tolerant, impartial and non-divisive forum for collecting the views of finch and softbill aviculturists and providing a cohesive interface with other avicultural bodies.
- To promote the conservation of finch and softbill species both in the wild and in captivity through the support, development and implementation of research and restoration projects, and the establishment of co-operative captive breeding programs for targeted species.
- To assist and advise all governments and their agencies on any matters relating to finches and softbills.
- The National Finch and Softbill Association will strongly and publicly oppose the trapping of wild finches and softbills and the smuggling of finches and softbills and their eggs. It will use its best endeavours to assist government bodies achieve the conviction of bird smugglers, and will advise government on the most effective methods of prevention.
- To improve the image of aviculture as a legitimate and respected leisure activity within the Australian community.

(carried unanimously 46-0)

The name and structure of the proposed national body was next discussed at length. It was decided to include softbills as well as finches.

(carried unanimously 46-0)

Discussion of possible names came down to a choice between the:

National Finch and Softbill Association

or

National Finch and Softbill Association of Australia.

It was argued that it was preferable to avoid the term, “*of Australia*”, as quite a few other avicultural organisations have employed this terminology without actually being national bodies in the true sense of the word.

Name shall be: ***National Finch and Softbill Association***

(carried 39-7)

Interfacing with other existing avicultural bodies:

- ***Canary and Cage Bird Federation of Australia.***

C&CBFA secretary Ron Robertson indicated to the meeting that his organisation is willing to work with NFSA at executive and committee level.

- ***Australian Birdkeepers Association.***

ABA secretary Barbra Devnie indicated to the meeting that her organisation is willing to work with NFSA at executive and committee level, but stated that ABA may have to alter their constitution to be able to do this.

- ***Avicultural Federation of Australia.***

AFA Board member Arthur Orford indicated to the meeting that AFA is willing to work with NFSA at a national level.

Officers to be elected at Annual General Meeting.

President
Vice President
Secretary
Treasurer

Officers to be appointed by committee or at AGM.

Public Officer
Publicity Officer
Webmaster

Committee representatives to be elected by the executive or at the AGM.

1 from New South Wales
1 from Queensland
1 from Western Australia
1 from Victoria
1 from Tasmania
1 from South Australia
1 from Northern Territory
1 from Australian Capital Territory

- committee to appoint additional people as required.

(carried unanimously 46-0)

Nominations received for executive positions were:

President: Gary Fitt – Qld.

Vice President: Arthur Orford – WA.

Secretary: David Myers – NSW

Treasurer: Peter Phippen – NSW

There being no further nominations for the above positions, the four nominees were duly elected by acclamation.

The newly elected President, Mr Gary Fitt, took over the chair.

Incorporation

It was suggested by Heather Brownette that the *National Finch and Softbill Association* take steps to become an incorporated association in NSW.

(carried unanimously 46-0)

The NFSA secretary, David Myers was appointed Public Officer.

Funding.

The following suggestions were put forward as methods to raise funds:

- membership fees – club and individual
- donations
- sponsorships
- fundraisers such as raffles
- affiliation fees

Nick Gascoigne, from the federal *Department of Environment and Heritage* addressed the meeting. Topics covered included:

1. The *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act)

DEH has the responsibility to administer the act.

The main aims are:

- to protect Australia's biodiversity from potential threats posed by illegally imported invasive species.
- to protect Australia's biodiversity from potential threat of exotic diseases carried by exotic species.
- to curb the illegal importation of exotic species.
- to ensure that the Australian government meets its international treaty obligations under CITES in relation to the illegal international trade in threatened species.

2. The role of the *Exotic Bird Advisory Group* (EBAG)

- The minister has the power to regulate the keeping of exotic birds in Australia without consulting aviculturists.
- EBAG has been set up to advise the minister in this regard. Its role is solely an advisory one.
- EBAG has been set up to give birdkeepers a voice in the process.

Nick Gascoigne's address to the meeting was interspersed with a variety of questions and comments seeking information and the clarification of points made.

Q1. Why was NEBRS abandoned?

A. The minister closed the scheme. The Department did not administer it well. A lot of birdkeepers did not participate. Record keeping has been a requirement since 1996. That hasn't changed.

Q2. Why will this scheme be different?

A. DEH is encouraging birdkeepers to keep useful records to help verify where their birds come from. These are records that we expect you to keep to help achieve DEH's 3 main objectives.

Q3. What process do you have to go through to move birds from class 3 to class 4?

A. The current list is a judgement made by EBAG for comment. It has been put out there solely for comment. We will need to argue for each species against the 3 criteria. eg. by CSIRO and/or other research organisations.

Q4. What happens to a person who has started bird keeping since 2002?

A. This is a tough issue to be discussed at the next EBAG meeting.

Q5. Is the same process happening with other exotic animals?

A. Yes, but slightly different. Legislation has to be broad to cover all exotic animals.

Q6. How is it going to be policed?

A. With the support of aviculturists.

Q7. Whose confidence is DEH trying to build?

A. Confidence between DEH and aviculturists.

Q8. Will this scheme allow the future importation of finches?

A. You can go down that path now anyway. The live import list is open and anyone can apply, however risk assessments have to be done. The list can be amended. AQIS has currently shut the door on avian imports due to the risks posed by avian influenza.

Q9. Are all species in class 3 low category risk?

A. Not necessarily. May change over time with some being reclassified as high. We obviously need a more robust way of doing risk assessments.

Mike Fidler made the comment that any potential risk to biodiversity and disease with respect to finches has been negated due to the length of time exotic species have been in Australia. Therefore smuggling is the only high risk area that DEH could be interested in with regard to the finches.

This proposition was put to Nick Gascoigne, who, after being assured that it was not a trick question designed to 'trip him up', agreed that this may turn out to be the case.

Q10. How far does the proposed system go?

A. There is a need for a new, practical system. We are trying to promote self-regulation.

Q11. Why are 3 of the EBAG members from the commercial side of aviculture?

A. Nick Gascoigne explained the process leading up to the formation of EBAG. He did concede that possibly it could have been done better, but also stated that what was now in place would not be changed.

A number of people made the point that smuggling finches is not a profitable proposition as they are so cheap and that only live birds could be smuggled as finch eggs cannot be artificially incubated. With current border security, this was considered very low risk.

It was pointed out that the risks associated with finches was considerably lower in all categories when compared to parrots etc.

There was general consensus that all finches should be in category four.

Q12. Will you give the reasons for the placing of the finches in each category?

A. It was stressed that the current document was purely for discussion purposes and that comments had been called for before the next meeting in December. The final sorting will be done by DEH.

Doug Hill, *President of the Finch Society of Australia*, made the comment that he represented one of the largest Finch Societies in Australia and that he felt that the majority of his members would refuse to fill in forms or keep records if all of the finches were placed in class 3.

Q13. Should we use experts to do pest risk assessments?

A. We use current data. eg. current Qld and WA risk assessments. We don't want people to duplicate submissions. We make decisions based on inputs.

Q14. How will DEH fund this?

A. DEH is meeting the costs at present. There may be cost recovery for forms etc., but if it is too expensive then people may not do it.

FOR INFORMATION ONLY - Category definitions from DEH website.

High interest birds

Class 1 birds

- It is a bird movement monitoring system.
- The Activity Records must be maintained and submitted to the Department annually.
- Department supplied Movement Transaction Record must include individual bird identification.
- The MTR will have four copies with the buyer holding copy 1, the seller holding copy 2 and the buyer sending copy 3, and seller sending copy 4 to the Department.
- Copies 3 and 4 will be kept by the Department as a central record and for monitoring.

Class 2 birds

- It is a bird movement monitoring system.
- The Activity Records must be maintained and submitted to the Department annually.
- Department supplied Movement Transaction Record must include individual bird identification.
- The MTR will have four copies with the buyer holding copy 1, the seller holding copy 2.

Low interest birds

Class 3 birds

- Activity Records are not required.
- Movement Transaction Record required but individual bird identification is optional at the discretion of birdkeepers.
- A modified movement transaction form could be developed for Class 3 bird transactions based on similar information recorded on the Class 1 and 2 birds MTR form

Exempt birds

Class 4 birds (exempt from requiring records)

- Activity Records are not required.
- Movement Transaction Record not required for transactions but EBAG recommends a receipt be issued and kept by parties to the transaction.

David Myers.

Secretary NFSA

1st November, 2006