



## The United Bird Societies of South Australia Inc.

An affiliate of the Avicultural Federation of Australia Incorporated.

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Mr. Lloyd Marshall  
Editor  
Talking Birds NewsMagazine  
PO Box 355  
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Dear Lloyd,

We refer to the November 2011 edition of "Talking Birds" and, in particular, to the Editorial and supplementary article relating to the United Bird Societies of SA Inc. (UBSSA) and their effort to attempt to re-activate The Avicultural Federation of Australia Inc. (AFA).

We as the group currently holding the positions of Chairman, Deputy Chairman and Executive Officer of AFA take exception to be included in any article with a headline including the "mob" or any other such derogatory terminology. We are not animals – we are not gangsters – and we consider this wording to be an insulting abuse of the discretions you have as a journalist and editor.

Personality clashes are inherent within any organisation however the aims and the structure of the organisation ought to be capable of managing such issues as they really are just asides to the real aims of the body.

The structure of AFA – the "old model" as you call it – is said by you to be "flawed". No – it is not the structure that is flawed – the general apathy of our bird keeping fraternity and the dominant self-interests of some is what led the ineffectual functioning of AFA. Let us make a few points.

The existing structure of AFA provides every bird keeper in Australia with the opportunity to contribute to the administration and well-being of aviculture in this country. They may not wish to be involved in avian administration however the real point is that there is the opportunity for everyone to get a point of view aired. First of all, every bird keeper has the option to join a Bird Club – that is the first step.

In South Australia, we have 25 clubs affiliated with UBSSA and we proudly believe that there are no other un-affiliated clubs in the State. UBSSA comprises a Council of nine (9) elected persons. To be eligible for a Council position, a person must firstly be a member of an affiliated club. A person can be nominated for Council appointment by any affiliated club – not necessarily the club of which that person is a member. Therefore, the opportunity exists for aviculturists at large to nominate people who are seen to be good for the betterment of aviculture in South Australia. Councillors are elected for two (2)

year terms at the Annual General Meeting (AGM) at which delegates from all affiliated clubs are entitled to attend and to vote – one (1) vote per affiliate.

The AGM is also open to our Supporters and the affiliate clubs can send as many delegates as they wish but each club has only one (1) vote. Supporters are not entitled to a vote.

At the AGM and at any other delegates meetings that may be called from time to time, the affiliated clubs have the opportunity to raise any issues for discussion/voting. The nine (9) person Council is required to function within the courses of action passed at any delegates meeting. The Council cannot and does not take actions on issues without the support and direction of the affiliated clubs. The UBSSA Council does not get involved in the day to day administration of affiliate clubs however it is recognised as the peak avicultural body in South Australia responsible for negotiation, consultation, and liaison with government and other authorities.

Representatives are appointed by the UBSSA Council (from the Council membership) to represent South Australia on the national body i.e. AFA. Through this established structure, it is possible therefore for every bird keeper in South Australia to make a contribution right through to the national body.

The UBSSA structure has served South Australian aviculture well since its formation in 1979 and this functional structure is basically the structure upon which AFA is based. For AFA we substitute the local club affiliates with the various State delegates and we substitute the subservient UBSSA Council with the AFA Secretariat – a group that is subservient to the Board of Management (BoM).

There seems to be a massive misconception of the role of The Secretariat. This group does not have a decision making role – it is merely the administrative arm of the BoM – there to distribute information, co-ordinate correspondence, facilitate meetings, facilitate elections and generally ensure that AFA meets its constitutional requirements. Just like South Australia's UBSSA Council, The Secretariat cannot make significant decisions without the support of the affiliates and to assert otherwise shows a gross misunderstanding of the operational processes and of the inherent structural strength of AFA.

In the past this structure operated in most of the Australian States and the Northern Territory and although the position in New South Wales has not always been as clear, there was representation from that State too. The fact that other States saw fit to step back from AFA - due to what we understand were personality issues and other perceived difficulties – does not necessarily translate into the AFA structure being flawed.

The AFA affiliate States have the power to make nominations to fill the Senior positions (and thus The Secretariat positions) at the AGM of AFA – if the affiliates see fit to attend AGM's and to actually promote who they believe to be more satisfactory people to those top positions. How does an organisation (with such a voting structure available) attain a change of personnel if the affiliates don't act? It is not the fault of a flawed structure of AFA – it is the apathy of States behaving like sulking school children if someone else doesn't effect the changes they want to see happen, or if they don't get their own way. What has happened to the basic democratic principles of which this country is so proud?

There has been much implied about the AFA constitution and the need for change. The same situation exists with this issue as well. The structure allows affiliates to make submissions for change to The Secretariat for the consideration of the BoM (comprising representatives from all affiliates), a subsequent vote by the BoM and then the implementing of approved amendments by The Secretariat. AFA is an incorporated body (in South Australia) and is required to meet the appropriate legislative requirements and codes of conduct.

The significance of the place of actual residence of people prepared to stand for AFA positions seems to be over stated. The affiliates had the power to remove elected officers if a majority of affiliates became dissatisfied with performance. The fact that no such actions were taken and affiliates opted to withdraw from the AFA is not a reflection on the structure of AFA but reflects on the attitudes adopted by those affiliates in not nominating replacement officers.

Appointments to the AFA BoM (with a possible subsequent appointment to The Secretariat) arise from nominations from AFA affiliates in accordance with the constitution which has a basic requirement for such nominees to be members of State Councils e.g. UBSSA.

Should one of our UBSSA Councillors reside in Broken Hill and fulfil all other requirements, why should the fact that such person resides in New South Wales be an impediment to being able to make an avicultural contribution in South Australia and, indeed, nationally? As an actual scenario, we have had enquiries re AFA affiliation from the ACT and should that group decide to re-affiliate with AFA, their current President would (under such residential restrictions) be ineligible to hold a position on the AFA BoM as this person resides outside of the ACT boundary – just into NSW. To limit access to avicultural expertise through such restriction is nothing short of ludicrous. The reference in your Editorial to residency issues “caused discontent aplenty” was more to do with the personality conflicts than a flawed structure of AFA. The AFA constitution was reviewed and amended in 2008 after due processes were undertaken by the BoM. One of the proposed alterations rejected by the majority of affiliates at that time related to the residency issue.

You note the inactivity of AFA in the lobbying of politicians but in defence of the principles of the AFA operations, the affiliates (through their representation on the BoM) seemingly did little to direct the subservient Secretariat on desired courses of action. Technically, The Secretariat had its hands tied through the lack of effort (or apathy) shown by the AFA affiliates.

We repeat – the structure is there – the desire to make it work is what is lacking.

We believe that the AFA should not be referred to as an organisation that seems to be “good for nothing except for running loss-making conventions”. We would point out to you that National Conventions have never been run by AFA – they have been hosted by the individual State bodies under the auspices of AFA and the profit/loss outcomes are the results of the organisational skills of the individual State bodies as well as attendance levels by aviculturists.

We are fully aware of the difficulties associated with attempting to kick start an ailing function however we believe that, in the best interests of aviculture in Australia, this is

something that needs to be attempted and needs to be openly supported by media publications.

Throughout your commentary in the November edition, you imply that Mr Brian Reichelt is the person responsible for what is trying to be achieved. You are advised that Mr Reichelt is the Executive Officer of UBSSA who is required to co-ordinate and implement the instructions of the UBSSA Council who in turn are instructed by the bird clubs of South Australia. To quote and infer Mr Reichelt as having such a personal role is clearly wrong – it is UBSSA that is driving this revival of AFA effort – not Mr Reichelt. UBSSA sees the need for a national body representing avicultural interests to combat ongoing governmental changes e.g biosecurity, cost recovery, etc.

We hope that the other States can see their way to joining with UBSSA in trying to again have a unified national voice for aviculture.

The journalistic licence that you exercised in the presentation of this matter on page 2 of the November edition of “Talking Birds” is disappointingly negative. The same information provided to you was also made available to another national avicultural publication where it was used in a factual way without the journalistic dramatisation and negativity that you produced. Do you want us to fail?

We close by asserting that the structure of AFA is solid but we recognise that the strength of the success of the organisation will be highly dependent upon the sincere and loyal participation, and contribution, from affiliate bodies.

Please publish this Letter to the Editor in its entirety without amendment.

Without prejudice.

**David Johncock**

David Johncock Chairperson UBSSA

**Brian Reichelt**

Brian Reichelt Executive Officer UBSSA

**Kevin Goulter**

Kevin Goulter Publicity Officer UBSSA

13<sup>th</sup> November 2011