

Model Aeronautical Association of Australia

Council Conference – Pullman Hotel, Sydney - 18 May, 2024.

Vice President's Report to Council

It has been my pleasure to serve as vice president of the Model Aeronautical Association of Australia for the past 12 months. I have two years left to run on my term as vice president.

It has been a challenging year in many ways. We have dealt with and continue to deal with many diverse issues. However, we should never lose sight of why we are here and what our members expect of us.

Fundamentally (and somewhat in spite of the lofty objects set out in the statement of rules) the functions of the Model Aeronautical Association of Australia should be mundane. Distilled down to the most basic elements, we are here to facilitate our members pursuit and enjoyment of aeromodelling with safety.

Our members have been flying models for 75 plus years and have done so with an impeccable safety record when it comes to conflicts with manned aviation. Facilitated by technology, our operations have never been safer. From time to time, this reality appears lost on some of our stakeholders.

What does this mean in a practical sense? The two major requirements are that we secure our members rights to use the airspace (without inappropriate interference or regulation) and provide insurance coverage in the unfortunate event an incident does occur.

In the last 12 months has been modestly successful in this regard. Despite challenges within the insurance marketplace we were able to provide good insurance coverage to our members. The insurance premium went up significantly last year. However, due to a good claims record in the last 12 months (once again reflecting on our safe operations) this years premium will be significantly discounted.

The regulation of our members presents an ongoing challenge and an opportunity for significant improvement going forward. We are subject to increasing restrictions and the MAAA needs to be more sophisticated in its dealings with the regulator. Those who deal with CASA on behalf of the MAAA must have our member's interests as their sole priority and be free of conflicts of interest. Any self-imposed regulation or restriction must also be closely scrutinised for real benefits and outcomes.

Going forward, we need a very clear process around how engagements with the regulator are to take place, by whom and at what level. If we fail to do this, it will continue to be death by a thousand cuts with ongoing creeping restrictions imposed upon us.

As I said at the outset, the operations of the MAAA should be very mundane (at least from the perspective of our affiliate members). Those of us sitting around Executive and Council table realise that the reality is somewhat more complex. There are many issues that arise on a daily basis. However, much additional, unnecessary, and unproductive time has been spent on matters that provide no benefit to our affiliate members.

I humbly suggest that some actions of various groups have not been in the interests of the MAAA or its members (and have even been damaging to the standing and reputation of the MAAA). Personal agendas have been pursued. This must be called out.

The rules that govern us and the structures that they establish are arguably no longer fit for purpose. I am optimistic that during the next 12 months Council will commit to a process to update our rules. Similar can be said of our operational procedures, many of which have not been updated for close to 20 years. As we continue to engage with the regulator, this will continue to become more and more critical.

Looking forward we need to acknowledge some stark realities. We are a niche hobby and consistently diminishing each year – the numbers do not lie – this must be recognised in our planning for the future. We will have less people to do the work needed to provide the infrastructure, systems and support required by our members. The question must be asked, is the current structure of 11 separate aeromodelling associations to service the needs of less than 9000 members sustainable?

We must be prepared to acknowledge that some things must change. Some of those changes have already started. It is critical that all members and clubs receive the same level of support and service from the MAAA and the state associations. Discrimination, nepotism and cronyism have no place in Australian aeromodelling. To be a vibrant and high performing organisation, all stakeholders must act in the interests of aeromodelling. Decisions must be made on the basis of what is right and in the interests of aeromodelling; not based on who the protagonists are or who they are associated with.

Looking back on the last three years, I would like to note the significant contribution made by Tim Nolan as President of the MAAA. Tim has made significant sacrifices to further the interests of our members and the MAAA. I would like to take this opportunity to wish Tim well in his retirement from the MAAA Executive. I certainly look forward to enjoying some time on the flight line with Tim, focused on nothing more than the joy of flying model aeroplanes with mates.

I would also like to acknowledge the great contribution of Gary Pope as MAAA Treasurer. Gary is always available to take calls and to discuss any concerns or issues regarding the MAAA. He is always a voice of reason and logic when it comes to all the challenges of the MAAA. And his management of the financials is impeccable.

Later today we will elect Carl Bizon as President of the MAAA. I have not known Carl very long. However, having had a few conversations with him, I was very pleased to nominate Carl for the position of MAAA President. I have no doubts that he is an ideal candidate for the challenges that currently face the MAAA and I look forward to working with him closely to take the MAAA forward. Carl and I will undoubtedly have differing opinions and robust discussions from time to time. However, I have little doubt that working together (and together with the other members of the Executive and Council) we can achieve great outcomes for our members.

In conclusion, I look forward with working with you all in the forthcoming year to continue to deliver for our members.

Michael Hobson
Vice President