

Report to AGM 27th November 2022

Dear Members & friends . . .

The Patrons Medal 2022: The following are recipients of the Patrons Medal for 2022.

Alison Bennison on 140 points, from

- Sue Bentley on 129 points, and
- Anne Hitchen on 118 points.
- Gillian Ashley on 108 points.

Mark Pink on 115 points, from

- Len Strother on 112 Points, and
- Phil Bray on 108 points, and
- Matt Rodoreda on 107 points.

I'm pleased to provide this Patrons Report for 2021/22.

As usual it's been an interesting and demanding time with plenty of ups and downs along the way and I'll only highlight the most important issues and outcomes.

The End of Karma Lease and knock-on effects:

Accommodation: The loss of accommodation options offered by Karma are by now well known to the Members. For the time being and possibly even an extended time our members will have to plan well ahead to be able to secure suitable accommodation to fit with the club's events. The Management Committee will advise members of the appropriate dates well in advance and will also confirm the dates on which RIA accommodation bookings will be open with certain reminder follow-ups.

The Golf Course & Facilities: The end of Karmas lease of the golf course raised some serious questions for me.

Firstly, an Expression of Interest (EOI) document was raised and circulated by the RIA and on inspection, the terms of the EOI were found to be very onerous such that it might have resulted in there being no respondent to the EOI at all. Given that outcome, based on known preferences within the RIA executive, the RIA could seek to shut down the facility and that likelihood became a great concern.

Secondly, a new minister for tourism overseeing Rottneast had just been appointed and that added to my concern that without sufficient background understanding and knowledge, an approach by the RIA to the minister for approval to shut down the facility could be met with tacit approval based on only the one sided view put by RIA.

In response to these concerns, an emergency meeting to discuss the issues was conducted on 20th February with members of the Club Committees and invitees, Simon Bennison, Jeff King, John Parkinson and me.

The EOI: After discussing the issue at length it was decided that the club could not leave the matter of a meaningful reply to the EOI on a *wait and see* basis and as a protective measure at least, it would be prudent for the club to submit its own reply to the EOI. The outcome being sought wasn't necessarily for the club to take over the operational aspects albeit if that was the only option left open then that was a possibility.

To undertake the fairly onerous task, the Management Committee agreed to the formation of a Special Projects Group sub-committee. That group consisted Simon Bennison, Jeff King, John Parkinson, Phillip Brodie-Hall and me. The objective was to cover the potential for unfavourable or nil submission situation with priority to protecting the clubs historic rights. The club submitted a well-balanced and meaningful formal reply to the EOI. Glen Trebilcock and Aleisha also made a submission and on the premise that the clubs best position was to have a club-friendly proponent installed, we provided a formal positive reference in support of that as well.

Shortly before the EOI closed, I was contacted by a Director of Place Development, the firm that had already been granted the lease of the lodge redevelopment and was asked if I could assist them with their EOI submission. It was fairly clear that this firm would have the inside running and as long as the clubs interests were suitably embodied it would be prudent to assist them and I adopted that path.

The need to strengthen ministerial awareness: The concern was still held that the RIA could seek to take the opportunity of uncertainty to close down the course and that the new minister might not have enough factual and balanced information available to be able to counter such an approach if such was made. The decision was made to seek a meeting with the minister so that our side of the story could be tabled. We were able to secure a meeting with Roger Cook and his chief advisory executive on the 21st April 2022 that included Simon Bennison, Jeff King and me. Jeff and his son Sam had provided very important assistance pre-meeting with the production of a very positive overview of the course, club, its history and significant heritage values in printed folder format that included plenty of colourful photographs and brief but interesting dialogue. That production was very well received by the minister and his executive and paved the way for meaningful discussions that led to a very worthwhile outcome. We could be reasonably confident that if the RIA should push an adverse proposition, it would not be easily met with approval at ministerial level.

The RIA Board: The board has been both kept informed and consulted on issues as they occur and I'm pleased to be able to say that the main people at board level are in favour of the golf course and very supportive of the clubs role and also the prospect of developing the Clubhouse/golf/bowls facility into a key activity based hub on Rottnest. The level of support has been confirmed by the board's commitment to seriously increased funding of the golf course turf management program until a more comprehensive lease can be established that will embody that expense. The RIA board and executive can be thanked for that commitment and financial input as without that the situation would be extremely undermined!

Outcome of the EOI:

I'm pleased to report that our support has been influential in Place Development being awarded the operational aspects of the facility. Most importantly, our objective of preserving the clubs rights has been realised and those rights remain to be unchanged from those previously and currently enjoyed.

Operational Management: Due to some limitations embodied in the Rottnest Island Management Plan (RIMP) the term allowed in the lease was limited to 36 months. Once the new RMIP is finalized with the necessary changes included, there will be another EOI published for a long term arrangement that will allow for significant investment and improvements to the course and associated facilities.

Place Development has engaged an experienced facility management firm, 'Social Grounds' to operate the clubhouse facility and golf operations aspects. Although new to our specific club make-up and demographic, Social has done a pretty good job of supporting two of our events this year. There have been some issues that have needed addressing, such as liquor types to be provided and the like but these issues are being dealt with amiably and generally heading in the right direction. Our stalwart Leisa Jeffery has made major positive contributions to best outcomes.

The liquor licence type has prevented expansion of Clubhouse activities and that is being addressed by the application for another liquor licence style that will allow inclusion of general public participation. We're working toward a replacement of the lost Gov's Sports Bar type facility with family friendly enhancements that will promote a real activity hub for Rottnest. It's hoped that the new liquor licence will be in place before the start of the upcoming Christmas holiday period.

Golf Course Turf Management: Also due to the short lease term, the turf management requirements of the course are presently the responsibility of the RIA and it is doing that with experienced turf management contractors such as MCL that have been involved for some time now.

The clubs Golf Course Turf and Greens sub-committee consisting Greg Whitmee, Simon Bennison and me has continued through the year to do course inspections and report problem areas to the RIA and MCL.

Additionally quarterly course condition reports are submitted to both the RIA Board and RIA CEO and executive. This work is very important for holding our course to a good playable level but even more important in taking steps to gain further improvement.

A day or two prior to our events, Greg, Simon and a few of our members when available have attended the course and undertaken certain works to enhance the course for play of our events and they are to be thanked for that time consuming valuable input. Greg Whitmee will provide a report to the AGM.

Golf Event Logistics: An important factor that strongly supports our events is the carriage by ferry operators of our golf equipment in dedicated crates and the transport of those from the jetty landing area to the clubhouse and back. As a form of sponsorship, for many years Programmed has conducted the on-island transport however due to staff and executive changes over time the understanding has been lost to the present executive. A recent meeting with Programmed has reinstated the arrangement as a form of sponsorship for the foreseeable future.

Sponsorship: To help avoid instances such as what's occurred with Programmed, I urge the Committee to ensure that sponsors logos are highlighted in all of our correspondence and that they receive copies of that correspondence to reinforce their individual commitments. An annual letter of thanks for ongoing support noting upcoming events and such would also be advisable.

Competition promotion: Our four club events aside that are now reasonably secured, in promotion of the value of the course I'm looking at assisting with the introduction of some "Offshore Golf" events targeting certain demographics all aimed at exposing and elevating the status of the course and its unique values. This can only come into full force once certain conditions are met; the course needs to be at a consistently high standard; the facilities require certain upgrades and an appropriate liquor licence needs to be in place. All of these issues are planned and moving, albeit slowly, in the right direction. Our club may choose to take some part in the organization of such events and that will be looked at when the time comes.

Longest Day promotion: On the promotional side, I've been contacted by a chap that is very keen to introduce a Longest Day event on Rottnest. In short, the event is a fundraiser for cancer research etc. The event is very big in the Eastern States but not so much here at this stage. The event involves super fit athletic golfers aiming to play 72 holes of golf in a day however there are several other categories that are less demanding. The unique limitations of Rottnest, the course only being 9 holes etc are challenging but the concept can be moulded to suit and that's what's being worked on at this stage. So far I've attended a meeting with Cancer Council and they've agreed to support the event if it can be put together satisfactorily. Simon Bennison and Jeff King have agreed to get into the details and possibilities of promoting such an event on our course and will be meeting with the proposer in the next few days to see where or if the concept could be taken. I see it as not only good means of raising funds for a worthwhile cause but also a great opportunity to expose the value of the Rottnest Golf course and facilities. Once again, the part that our club may or may not take is a matter to be looked at as the proposal advances, if indeed it does. For more information about the event check the website www.longestday.org.au

There's a number of other issues in the mix that I'll bring you up to date on as and if they become important issues or opportunities but I think enough is covered for now.

Aprille and I wish you all a safe and happy Christmas and New Year and look forward to another good and successful season that lies ahead.

Best Regards . . .

John Birkett
RIGC Patron

27th Nov 2022