

Annual Report by Chairman of Co-operatives Victoria at 2011 AGM

The attendance by Tony Rogic, Chairman of CFNSW, at our last AGM gave us renewed hope that a closer relationship between our two Federations would improve the climate for growth in the Australian co-operative sector, and the fostering of Co-operative Education, which we perceive as being the way to prevent any more de-mutualisations.

During the year that I have been back in the Chair at CFV I have had a number of telephone discussions with Tony Rogic, who assured me that changes in the relationship between our two Federations would happen after the NSW AGM. This is slower to eventuate than we had hoped for, particularly the development of strategies to encourage transformation of Co-operatives Australia into an incorporated body with the resources to more effectively represent the sector to Government, the bureaucracy and the public.

Co-operatives Australia, as presently constituted, is an unincorporated body consisting of representatives of the State Federations, which has no bank account or money, and which cannot do or say anything unless a spokesperson is given prior authorisation by a meeting! Tasmania has no State Federation, and I visited Hobart earlier in the year to chair a meeting of interested co-operatives to discuss the matter. The outcome was that a majority favoured joining the Victorian Federation, which could be re-named to reflect that situation. Unfortunately the largest Tasmanian Co-op, Betta Milk, has declined to be involved, and most of the others are small co-ops in the craft and housing fields. Rule changes which we hope to have approved today will accommodate Tasmanian representation on the CFV Board. (Linda Seaborn of Co-housing Co-op in Hobart is with us today on Skype, and will be attending the Canberra Summit next Tuesday.)

As Chairman of Co-operatives Australia I was invited to participate in the CEOs & Chairs Summit of around 45 of the top 100 Australian Co-operatives, Mutuals, Credit Unions and Building Societies, held in Canberra last August. This was auspiced by Social Business Australia, which under the dynamic leadership of Trent Bartlett, then CEO of Capricorn Society, undertook the lead role in promoting the Australian celebration of IYC2012. This would not have succeeded as well as it has to date without the injection of a large amount of funds by the Capricorn Society.

The major resolution of the August Summit was that we must find a way to form a "Social Business Council" to represent all Co-operatives, Credit Unions and Mutuals in a manner similar to that performed on behalf of "big business" by the Business Council of Australia. We envy the way in which the BCA manages to "get the ear" of Government and Bureaucrats and thereby influence policy decisions which sometimes run counter to our own. It was agreed that Daniel Newlan of Abacus and Colin Heavyside of Capricorn would work up a proposal for consideration at another Summit, to be conducted before the end of 2011. This second Summit is scheduled to take place at Parliament House, Canberra, on 22nd November, 2011, following on from the Official Launch of IYC2012 in Australia. Three members of the Australian IYC Steering Committee attended the International Launch in New York several weeks ago. Achievements to date by the Australian IYC2012 Steering Committee include getting the Mint to produce a commemorative coin, Australia Post to produce commemorative postage stamps, and the Australian Bureau of Statistics to give better coverage of our sector in the Australian Year Book.

We have long regarded the lack of an Australian Co-operative Bank as being an impediment to growth of the co-op sector in general, and we were delighted to learn that one of our CFV members, mecu, became a bank on 1st September, 2011, without turning its back on its co-operative roots by becoming an investor-owned corporation. We thank

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Rowan Dowland for leading bankmecu into membership of our Federation, and congratulate him on having played a major role in his Credit Co-operative becoming "Australia's First Customer-owned Bank".

Tentative arrangements which were in place for another visit to the Southern Hemisphere by Chris Cooper of the Co-operative College, UK, in late October and early November, 2011 fell over when insufficient firm bookings eventuated for his "Co-operative Identity" workshops. We are now engaged in trying to interest co-operatives in participating in one of these workshops in March, 2012, when Chris will accompany Mervyn Wilson, CEO & Principal of the Co-operative College, who is to be a Keynote Speaker at "The AM Institute 2012 Business Strategy Forum" which will be held in Sydney on 3rd & 4th March 2012. The Australasian Mutuals Institute was formed from an amalgamation between the Australian Institute of Credit Union Directors and the Australian Institute of Credit Union Management (of which I was a member around 25 years ago). The CFV Board is exploring the possibility of interesting AMI in becoming an accredited presenter of Co-op College material, to enable us to offer it to Australian co-operatives at a more affordable cost. We will arrange for Ken Pickering of AMI and several CFV Directors to meet Mervyn Wilson in Sydney next March to further refine this proposal.

We look forward to our celebration of IYC2012 being the catalyst for creating a greater awareness of the last three of the seven "Co-operative Principles" which govern our behaviour. Many of our current problems are due to insufficient importance having been attached to these principles.

Tony O'Shea
Chairman. 15th November, 2011.