

7 February 2023

To Regional Committees

I want to acknowledge receipt of the emails from Jane Steans (Auckland Northland) and from Bryan Green (Central Districts). I am aware emails have been shared with the regions hence this general communication and response to all regions.

I hate to say it but there appears to be a disconnect between the regional committees and NZB. I fear this emanated from a conversation some years back about the future of regional committees and the prospect the committees may have passed their used by date. This was most unfortunate as the intent was never to see the winding up of the regional representation. It was more about ensuring our service was matching the needs of clubs.

Putting the above aside there is still a disconnect. We tried last October to bring the regional committees and the regional support people together. Alas there was little support from the regions and event never happened. Then we tried again to make it happen in January. Again, little support and enthusiasm for a meeting. Pleasingly we are now meeting at the end of March. It would be helpful if you put your mind to the future of the regional support resource. Some regions are behind the regional support initiative whilst others are questioning the value. We need to ask whether the current role of the regional support people is working or whether we would get better bang for our buck by re-allocating resource into other areas of need.

Hopefully the output from the meeting will be an agreed action plan where we are all be on the same page. Budgeting and the approval process should be a lot easier.

In addition to losing our way we have had to contend with Covid-19. We know as we emerge from lockdowns and gathering limits, the behaviour and routines of members has changed. The decision by clubs, in particular Auckland, to introduce online bridge has had an unforeseen consequence that there is a cohort who now only want to play online. We must be open and willing to



acknowledge changes in society and adapt to the best of our ability. More on this latter point later in this communique.

Regional Committees are asking for guidance as to what the organisation requires of them. There is significant confusion which is impacting on planning and budgeting. Prior to 2020 the organisation had a well-established strategic plan. Covid threw our plans into disarray as we focused on survival.

Today the community is accepting that Covid is part of our daily lives. It is dangerous to generalize but by and large most clubs are up and running and in-person bridge is or has returned to pre-covid numbers, which is a pleasing result. Nevertheless, there are a few clubs that continue to struggle, and it may take time for them to fully recover, or they may have to change their model to be a viable unit.

We know membership numbers have dropped over the last few months. Some of this is due to seasonal fluctuations; due to normal attrition; due to players exiting for Covid reasons; and/or because clubs have been unable to run beginner classes.

On a happier note, two non-affiliated clubs in the Auckland Northland region have joined the fold bolstering our numbers a little.

Late last year we shared our thoughts with the regions. We said:

The last 3 years have been a challenge for everyone. Now the economy, probably for the next 12-24 months, will experience severe head winds which may impact membership as players behaviour and routines change. A significant amount is unknown, but we should be planning for the challenges ahead. The Board has a very clear focus and that is **helping clubs to run efficiently and effectively; to be financially healthy; to grow membership; and to grow participation.**

For us to be successful we (NZB and Regional Committees) need to all be pulling together and in the same direction. That means we need alignment of our business plans and consistency on how we spend our money. The Regional Committees are a vital cog because they more than anyone else should know what support and services clubs require.



In addition to a membership drive and growing participation the regional committees retain a role in organizing/managing regional congresses and tournaments, supporting coaching and teaching, local marketing, inter provincials, and interclub (if applicable).

Covid has forced us to think about our role and responsibilities, those of the Regional Committees and those of the clubs. It is important we recognize clubs are independent legal entities, accountable to their members. As an organisation our influence extends to cover

1. Compliance with our rules and regulations.
2. Compliance with the rules governing the game.
3. The tournament schedule.
4. Masterpoints.
5. Building marketing collateral.
6. Providing templates and tools for use, eg. beginner lesson material.
7. Running major events- congress, regional events, inter-provincials, and New Zealand Wide Pairs.
8. Supporting growth and player participation.
9. A willingness to invest in resource to helps regions and clubs grow membership and other identified needs.

Over the last 6 months we have investigated and developed an online strategy which is subject to a testing framework throughout 2023. The trial will help us determine the shape of our game in the future. What is self-evident it will not be one or the other.

Nothing has changed from our earlier communique. The focus must be on helping clubs run efficiently and effectively, to be financially healthy, to grow membership, to grow player participation.

We have been asked to share our strategic plan and to ensure clarity with the budget process and approval regime. We have consciously set aside our previous strategic plan. The focus today and tomorrow is solely on growth and participation, providing tools for clubs to operate efficiently and effectively.



So, what does all this mean? We need regional committees to connect with clubs in their region and find out what clubs want from New Zealand Bridge. This might include:

1. Beginner and Improver lesson material
2. Marketing collateral.
3. Resource support
4. Administration toolkit.
5. Director training

It is important we remember clubs are our member and we should go out of our way not to compete with any club. We are here to support clubs not to compete.

We need clubs to encourage their players back to the table. We need clubs to encourage their players to partake in tournaments. Recent results show an uplift in players returning to the club and to tournaments, but more is required. The more clubs grow their numbers and increase player participation the more financially independent they will be.

We do not see the role of the regions to subsidize events. All tournaments should be financially neutral and funded on an user pays basis. We are willing to support a marketing grant (by application) for each club capped at no more than \$300 per club. We are also willing to continue to support youth, but once they are in full time work any financial support would come to an end. Each region should set its own youth subsidy policy. We suggest this should not exceed \$150 for each youth player.

We accept our budget process should be more robust. Once we have an agreed plan for 2023/2024 you will be able to finalize your budget. In normal years the plan must be to have a draft regional budget by 28 February. Each budget will be the subject of a review and approval by 31 March. The review will be the subject a budget challenge by the board member responsible for finance and a representative of the regional committee. The 2023/2024 year by necessity will be different in that our plans will not be finalized until after we meet in late March. Hopefully thereafter we can get into a routine of completing plans and budgets as outlined above.

I would hate to leave you with the message we are not appreciative of the work done by the Regional Committees. We are appreciative and value the amount of



time given to the wellbeing of our game. Time is such a precious commodity so finding ways to be more efficient and collaborative must be on our agenda.

We need to be mature enough to own up to the fact things could have been done better. That applies to all of us. As we move into 2023/2024, I am only interested in looking forward. Very little can be gained by trawling over the past other than ensuring we do not make the same mistakes.

Look forward to seeing you on the 26th of March.

Cheers Allan

