



# Highgate Highlights

Official Newsletter of Highgate RSL Sub-Branch  
Returned & Services League of Australia (WA)  
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**\$1 MILLION  
SUB BRANCH  
SUPPORT FUND  
ANNOUNCED**

## Why we need RSLWA leadership

By **GEOFF HOURN AM** | 0414 063 707 | ghourn@gmail.com  
**CANDIDATE FOR RSLWA STATE PRESIDENT**



In the best interests of RSLWA, there are four simple reasons why we need to change our current leadership in the forthcoming election.

- **First, we need to restore public confidence in RSLWA.**
- **Second, we need to restore the confidence of Sub Branches in RSLWA.**
- **Third, we need to save our Sub Branches.**
- **Fourth, we need regular renewal in the best interests of the RSL.**

Restoring public confidence can be achieved by changing leadership, and being seen to do so. The recent public relations derailment, which turned into a train wreck, was unnecessary and greatly worsened by rambling and confusing statements blaming the media for 'harmful' and 'incorrect' reporting.

The self-inflicted public relations disaster, in which RSLWA was publicly criticised by the Prime Minister down, needs to be remedied by refreshing the RSLWA leadership.

RSLWA needs a competent and articulate spokesperson. Statements on behalf of RSLWA should be made by the State President and not the CEO, after consultation to find out the majority opinion of Sub Branches. A State President should not choose to be invisible or go missing in action if things get tough.

### **Secondly, restoring the confidence of Sub Branches is critical.**

It requires greater openness and honesty by RSLWA. Sub Branches need to be given priority-support from the top down.

Sub Branches are currently taken for granted. What happened to Bunbury Sub Branch exemplifies this. Last year the CEO was sent as a messenger to Bunbury to unexpectedly inform the Sub Branch that their premises would be demolished and replaced with a six-storey commercial building.

There was no prior consultation or Sub Branch participation in the decision. This arrogant, do-as-you're-told, attitude typifies the current management style of RSLWA.

Other Sub Branches have been told that if they require essential repairs they must raise the money themselves, despite RSLWA owning the premises.

Just before Christmas this same management style saw it necessary to call an EGM to change the Constitution. The proposed changes would have entrenched those currently running RSLWA and further sideline Sub Branches.

The proposed changes were described as vital for 'good governance' and I notice that some in ANZAC House are still misusing the term as a catchphrase to justify various actions.

When I was Executive Director, Investigations for the Australian Securities and Investment Commission I regularly observed examples of good and bad governance. Occasionally Boards of Directors try to convince shareholders that certain actions are necessary, in the name of 'good governance', which ultimately disadvantage shareholders.

This was exactly the case with the proposed changes to the RSLWA Constitution. The proposed changes were in the interests of the Board of Directors but not in the interests of Sub Branches, members or the RSL in general.

Being obliged to point this out, I wrote an article *In the Guise of Good Governance*. Subsequently, the proposed constitutional changes were defeated at the EGM.

Although the EGM was several months ago, George Jones recently wrote (obviously for election purposes) that my comments were libellous. When discussing this with George on the phone, I pointed out that truth is a complete defence to a libel action.

What I wrote was scrupulously true and my article, *In the Guise of Good Governance*, is re-published in this edition of Highgate Highlights. George also indicated that my article offended him. The article was meant to be hard-hitting (and

**IMPORTANT  
RSLWA ELECTION  
INFORMATION FOR  
SUB BRANCHES**

*Please distribute swiftly  
to all your Members*



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## Why we need RSLWA leadership By Geoff Hourn AM (Cont.)

it was) but not to offend.

George, as well as the current State President and those on the current Board of Directors, are respected veterans and solid citizens. However, it is a bit rich to claim offence when the proposed, disingenuous, constitutional changes so greatly offended a majority of Sub Branches and so many RSL members.

It is a simple fact that when things are done in an underhand manner, more for personal gain than institutional benefit, shareholders (in this case our Sub Branches) lose confidence in Boards of Directors.

For this reason alone, the current RSLWA management should not be re-elected.

### **The third reason we need leadership change is to save our Sub Branches.**

I explained this in an article *Saving the Sub Branches*, also re-published in this edition.

I explained why it is so important to keep our network of small Sub Branches alive and to grow all of our Sub Branches – because that is where the veterans are!

### **I propose that once ANZAC House is re-opened, RSLWA should define 2021 as 'The Year of the Sub Branch'.**

### **A year focused on saving every small Sub Branch in WA, on increasing membership in all Sub Branches, on working out business models to restore, maintain and develop existing RSLWA properties and make them viable entities with a suitable return on investment.**

At present, there is a major commercial focus that needs to be balanced with our community focus – because veterans live in the community, not in St Georges Terrace or necessarily near proposed, centralised, RSL hubs.

Having said that, I give assurance that I will do everything in my power to make Veteran Central work and be as successful as it possibly can.

There has been so much time and money put into the concept of Veteran Central that there is no other alternative than to make every

effort to achieve a favourable outcome.

But we need to adjust our focus and involve our entire network of Sub Branches, in the interest of veterans. We need to reach out to veterans in communities – a concept seemingly ignored by the current RSLWA view.

### **One of the first proposals I will put to a new Board is establishment of a \$1 MILLION SUB BRANCH SUPPORT FUND**

**This support fund will be specifically for Sub Branches to improve the work of the RSL in local communities, undertake local recruitment and advertising, maintain and improve premises. The Sub Branch Support Fund will be replenished annually.**

Although it is over four months since the end of the RSLWA financial year, the current Board has yet to release a 2019 financial report. My intent is for funding of the Sub Branch Support Fund to come from the reported \$17 million finally recovered from the settlement of the sale of the RSLWA Retirement and Aged Care Association – money that has yet to be passed down to Sub Branches in any form.

### **The fourth compelling reason to change the current RSLWA management is in line with the Not for Profit Governance Principles of the Australian Institute of Company Directors.**

One of those principles is to limit tenure of Directors to encourage renewal. It is not in the best interests of RSLWA to extend the tenure of someone who has been on the Board for 12 years. After such a long time they become benchwarmers and time-servers. Regular renewal brings fresh perspectives to the Board of Directors in the best interests of RSLWA. We need good new people with good new ideas who want to work for the renewal of RSLWA. When such long tenure concludes, people should be warmly acknowledged and thanked for their years of service. But the RSL ship must sail on with a new crew.

Leading RSLWA requires more than just chairing Board meetings so let me explain my leadership style.

Firstly, I will attend every Sub Branch centenary celebration. Given they occur only once every 100 years, these are very special events in the life of the RSL.

I will also attend important Sub Branch events such as the annual Lieutenant Bell VC Memorial Lecture at Cottesloe and the annual Brigadier Arnold Potts Oration at Kojonup. The State President should support these, and every other important Sub Branch event. It is the right thing to do.

If, for some pressing reason, I am unavailable, I will expect the State Vice President to represent me. I know if Bill Munro is elected State Vice President, he will be at those events anyway. I will also be encouraging the Board Directors to do the same.

I will also be taking a leaf out of Graham Edwards' book and regularly visit as many Sub Branches each year as possible. Not to tell them how to run their Sub Branches but to listen and find out what the local issues are.

There is such a big difference between management and leadership and I will personally and regularly liaise with Sub Branch Presidents and seek their opinions.

It is so important not to be out of touch with the views of other RSL leaders and members.

I will lead in the area of veteran welfare advocacy. After 17 years experience as a Member of the Veterans' Review Board, I understand the complexities of veteran legislation and the roles of organisations like the Repatriation Medical Authority.

I will lead in the area of corporate governance.

My phone number and email address will be available to all RSL members and I will personally return all calls and emails.

There will be no public misunderstanding about who leads. I will not be invisible or pass that responsibility to others.

### **Now is the time for Sub Branches to come together and I call on your support to reset RSLWA for the better.**

*Please turn page to view more Candidate details*



## BILL MUNRO CANDIDATE FOR RSLWA STATE VICE PRESIDENT

In the next few days, your sub-branch delegate(s) will receive the voting pack from the WA Electoral Commission for the elections for members of the Board of RSLWA.

This election is being actively contested with two candidates for State President, three for Vice President and five for both the Metropolitan and Regional Board members.

This is in stark contrast to the 2014 and 2017 elections when most candidates were elected unopposed or the Board had to find a candidate because there was no nomination.

The Board of RSLWA has responsibility for financial governance and the investment policy of the organisation. I have concerns that RSLWA, under its existing board managed to lose \$3.3 million of members' funds in 2018 which included a \$2.6 million write-off in the value of its investments. It is now over four months since the end of



2019 and the 2019 financial statements have not yet been published.

**It's time for change.**

The new candidates have been nominated

by their sub-branch. They are all presidents or past presidents of their sub-branch and some have previously served on the State Executive or the Board of RSLWA.

They want to see the focus of RSLWA on the sub-branches, firmly believing that RSLWA exists to serve the sub-branches and its members.

I would like to be part of the new team and I am looking for your support.

At the end of 2019, after six years, I stepped down as a national director and treasurer of another not-for-profit

organisation which gives me the time to devote to the new position of State Vice-President.

I retain my roles as a member of the National Board of the Prostate Cancer Foundation and their WA Chairman and as Chairman of the Perth Korean Memorial Committee.

This latter committee was formed to work towards the construction of a memorial to Western Australian Korean veterans in Kings Park. Final plans have been submitted to the Kings Park Board and we await approval.

In the board positions I've held over the years, I have always aimed to make a difference, and to leave the organisation in a better position than when I joined it.

**With your support, and if I am successful in the election, I will work with that same target in mind.**

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*Please turn page to view more Candidate details*



## **GRAHAM EDWARDS AM - RSLWA Past President & Life Member** **CANDIDATE FOR RSLWA STATE BOARD MEMBER - METROPOLITAN REGION**



### **A few words about recent RSLWA history**

In 2012, I contested the RSLWA election as President because change was desperately

needed at Board level.

I served four years.

The then president had been there for 12 years. He wanted to cling to power.

Sub-branches were considered unimportant, They were forgotten, treated with arrogance and considered the enemy.

Consultation was non-existent.

Decisions were made in secret.

None worse than the decision to sell our lucrative aged care assets for a mere pittance.

A decision which cost RSLWA millions then and every year since, in lost revenue.

As part of the sale Mandurah sub-branch was evicted from their own premises. They were told RSLWA owns all properties.

No consultation - just ordered out.

That decision was made in secret. Minutes hidden. Records buried.

It was only the election of fresh faces in 2012 which uncovered that derelict decision.

A decision the current State President and others still associated with the Board were very much a part of.

Why was the then President in 2012 clinging to power? Why is the current State President after his 12 years on the Board still trying to cling to power?

### **This is history repeating itself.**

Once again sub-branches are being neglected, treated with arrogance, dictated to, considered the enemy and unimportant.

Decisions and plans are being made behind closed doors.

The State President, until the last few weeks, has been missing in action. As a consequence RSLWA is being run by paid staff and Perth-based money men.

What plans exist to give all sub-branches direct support for the future?

Are there undisclosed plans by RSLWA to purchase costly real estate in Albany and other places at the expense of sub-branches across the whole State?

Why are sub-branches being kept in the dark as to these plans?

RSLWA is not just a corporate business whose success is measured in the accumulation of assets.

We are a living breathing organisation made up of men and women who have served our nation in uniform.

We were founded on the spirit, history, bravery, sacrifice, and service of our original Anzacs. This is our proud heritage.

Our core values now and always must be based on mateship, advocacy, welfare, sub-branch support, volunteerism and caring about our membership.

Should we continue to neglect or turn our backs on these founding qualities for much longer then we run the risk of losing them forever.

What legacy do we then pass on to future generations?

The future of RSLWA is at the crossroads. Should we ignore history we are bound to repeat it.

**Please give your support to electing new people and fresh ideas to ensure the future security, success and well being of RSLWA.**

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*Please turn page to view more Candidate details*





## **GEORGE STARCEVICH - RSLWA Life Member** **CANDIDATE FOR RSLWA STATE BOARD MEMBER - COUNTRY REGION**

**G**eorge Starcevich served in the Royal Australian Navy for 20 years, earning seven Service and good conduct medals.

He has served as a volunteer with the Pink Lake Bushfire Brigade for 15 years and as an announcer at Hope FM103.9 Esperance Community Radio.

George was the inaugural Commanding Officer of the Australian Navy Cadets Training Ship *Kybra*.

He was an original committee member for Esperance Men in Sheds.



He has also served for eight years as an elected member of local government.

George has been a member of the Esperance Sub Branch since 1995 and held many positions.

He has been caterer, bar manager, welfare officer, Junior Vice President for two years, and served for over 11 years as Sub Branch President.

George is an RSL Life Member.

**He says: "I am putting my hand up for this election to try and help fight the decline in country RSLs. I call on your support to reset RSLWA for the better."**

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*Please turn page to view more Candidate details*



## ROB CASHMAN

### CANDIDATE FOR RSLWA STATE BOARD MEMBER – METROPOLITAN REGION



**R**ob Cashman is an Army veteran and father of two young children.

He served in Afghanistan in 2001-2002.

Whilst initially deployed as a cook, his persuasiveness saw him being attached to support the Ammunition Technician of his unit while deployed overseas.

As Rob describes it, he went from destroying meals to destroying bombs.

Rob volunteers his spare time with several charitable organisations.

These include St Pat's Community Support Centre in Fremantle, where he delivers food weekly to those in the community who are vulnerable or in need, including fellow veterans.

He is currently the President of the Fremantle City RSL Sub Branch.

He can be reached at [roberttcashman@hotmail.com](mailto:roberttcashman@hotmail.com), on 0466 650 312 or by searching Fremantle RSL on Facebook.

*(The double tt in his email address is correct)*

Rob believes that veterans have earned the right to be listened to, and they deserve only the best representation on the RSLWA Board.

Rob says, "Our sub branches are the lifeblood of the RSL, not in an office environment somewhere in the City.

"Our RSL needs your thoughts, your energy and your passion.

"That is the only way we can turn our progressive ideas into real change for our veterans in our communities.

**"More than ever, veterans and their families need assistance, empathy and leadership from their RSL.**

"And while Catering Corps was where I cut my teeth in the Army, what defines me today is my passion for my eternal belief that the average Digger is entitled to have their voice heard, and I am prepared to be that voice.

**"I call on your support to reset RSLWA for the better."**

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*Please turn page to read 'In the guise of good government' article*



## In the guise of good governance

By Geoff Hourn AM | Highgate RSL Warden & Immediate Past President

**Vladimir Putin has just proposed a constitutional overhaul that would extend his stay in power. He discussed the constitutional amendments during his annual state-of-the-nation address.**

Putin proposes amending the constitution to increase the powers of the prime minister and Cabinet. The move is seen as part of Mr Putin's efforts to carve out a new position of power for himself to stay at the helm after his current term of president ends.

It might seem a bit unkind, but one has to wonder whether the RSLWA Board of Directors has been advising Mr Putin.

Five days before Christmas, during a period when Sub Branches don't normally meet, RSLWA announced that there would be a 'snap' Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM) to consider changes to the RSLWA Constitution. There was no consultation or discussion beforehand with Sub Branches about the need for any change. Indeed, the January Sub Branch Signal doesn't even mention the EGM.

Undesirably, the proposed changes will entrench a small elite to run the RSL in WA. The changes will also exclude most Members from participating in the leadership of the RSL and extend the term of office of the proposed, exclusive, leadership group to four years.

The proposed changes will also grant the Board of Directors the power to appoint the State Vice President, as well as two non-elected Directors for an indeterminate period of office.

Getting back to Mr Putin, the BBC reports that under his plan the Russian parliament will be granted the power to appoint the prime minister and the rest of the cabinet. Just like the proposed RSLWA changes.

Under both Putin's and the RSLWA's rule changes, most stakeholders will be disenfranchised. In the case of the RSL, 98.35% of Members will be prevented from standing as a candidate for election to the Board of Directors.

This is because one of the rule changes will exclude Sub Branches from nominating more than one candidate for the Board. The proposal, like Mr Putin's, is breathtaking in its audacity. If passed, it would drastically emasculate the pool of talent the RSL can choose its leadership from.

There are about 7,500 Service Members in WA and 124 Sub Branches. If that rule change is passed only 124 of the 7,500 Service Members will be able to be candidates for election to the Board of Directors every four years. In other words, only 1.65% of Members will be able to stand for election.

Superficially, this proposal has been dressed up as 'good governance' but will mean that only one representative from each Sub Branch can stand as a candidate for election to the Board of Directors every four years. The proposal is more inequitable for Members of big Sub Branches. It has been poorly thought through and is definitely not in the best interests of the RSL.

The RSLWA Board of Directors, like Mr Putin, argues that the changes will be more democratic and will be more effective. Putin duplicitously explained it as bringing power closer to the people but simultaneously said that he wanted to provide a strong executive.

Regimes may say they have 'good governance' but can simply ignore stakeholders and often do. In the case of the RSL, the stakeholders are the Sub Branches.

Most commentators see Mr Putin's move as masking another agenda, despite all his talk about democracy. Commentators, and reasonable people, are wary when autocrats justify changes in the name of 'democracy' or 'good governance'.

Putin's reasoning is similar to that used in the RSLWA Supporting Statement for the proposed changes.

The term 'good governance' is mentioned throughout. Reading the Supporting Statement is a bit like hearing James Hird say: "Here, suck on this! Trust me, it will enhance performance".

The current Board's justification is that disenfranchising Members, extending the term of office holders, reducing the size of the Board of Directors, granting the Board the power to elect a State Vice President and to appoint outsiders to the Board will reflect 'the highest standards of governance' and be a method to 'reduce the potential for conflict of interest'. Such changes, of course, would be the antithesis of good governance.

I often think that the RSL Founding Fathers got it right. From 1917 until the 1990s the WA Branch conducted annual elections for State President and Board Members. This was a successful system of governance that held the State President and Board Members accountable to the Sub Branches at each Annual Congress.

Under the original system, if Boards of Directors looked after the Sub Branches they were re-elected for another 12 months. But more importantly, the system ensured that if they weren't looking after the Sub Branches they could be removed in a timely fashion – not four years later.

It was only after 75 years that the wisdom of our founding fathers was discarded and the annual tenure of the State President and Board of Directors was extended – firstly to two years and then to three years. And now they want four years!

The changes that are proposed will exclude broad leadership participation from among the 7,500 Service Members who are currently eligible to be elected and it will stifle leadership aspirations for most of our membership. It will block many talented and suitable candidates from nominating to serve on the Board of Directors, or as State Vice President or as State President.

***'In the guise of good government' article concludes next page***



## *In the guise of good governance - By Geoff Hourm AM (Cont.)*

Introducing four-year terms of office, along with the other changes, would be retrograde. Obviously it is in the interests of the Board of Directors but it is not in the interests of the RSL. It will condemn the RSL in WA to perpetual leadership by a small elite who are not regularly accountable to Sub Branches.

The proposal to extend terms of office is contrary to the Not for Profit Governance Principles of the Australian Institute of Company Directors. These Principles were updated as recently as March 2019.

The Institute's Principle 3 is that 'Tenure of Directors is limited to encourage renewal and staggered to retain corporate knowledge'.

As the AICD explains, 'It is a good idea for a director's tenure to be limited to encourage renewal. Although there may be good reasons for a director to serve for an extended period in certain circumstances, there are benefits to bringing fresh perspectives onto a board.'

AICD goes on to state: 'Limiting tenure will encourage regular review about whether their appointment continues to be in the best interest of the organisation'.

The proposed changes will hinder RSL renewal and evolution and are definitely not in the best interests of Sub Branches.

Every Life or Service Member of the RSL in WA should have the right to be a candidate for election to the Board of Directors of RSLWA each time an election is held. That is in the best interests of the RSL.

Westpac currently leads the field in how a Board can self-inflict a loss of stakeholder confidence. But the RSLWA Board has now entered the race with the proposed constitutional changes they want passed. Although RSLWA isn't in the same league as Westpac, this is a fine example of how a Board can quickly trash the confidence of its stakeholders.

What is written in the RSLWA Supporting Statement is a conscious effort to dress up this proposal in the guise of 'good governance' when in fact it is the complete opposite.

To label this proposal as reflecting 'the highest standards of governance' and a method to 'reduce the potential for conflict of interest' is disingenuous.

Mr Putin wouldn't want his big plan to be rejected, nor will the current RSLWA Board of Directors want theirs to be. If Sub Branches sit idly by, there is every chance that the current RSLWA Board will have its way.

The stated justification for these constitutional changes is Machiavellian.

**The proposed changes are contrary to real democracy and good-governance and, consequently, delegates and Sub Branch proxies for the EGM are urged to vote against the amendments being proposed by RSLWA.**

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***Please turn page to read 'Saving the Sub Branches' article***

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**Newsletter contributions are always welcome. Please send to [editor@highgate-rsl.org.au](mailto:editor@highgate-rsl.org.au)**







## Saving the Sub Branches

By Geoff Hourn AM | Highgate RSL Warden & Immediate Past President

In recent years there has been much anguished debate within the RSL about the future of some of our smaller Sub Branches. The closure of any Sub Branch is not just a loss for the RSL but a loss for a local community.

Sub Branches are the lifeblood of the RSL and are part of the lifeblood of many local communities. RSL Sub Branches have been part of the history of local communities for over a century now.

They are relied upon to care for local veterans, widows and families, lead commemorative services, provide speakers at schools, retirement homes, clubs and various gatherings and to provide a social focus in many communities.

In other States the RSL owns large licensed clubs with gaming, along with bowling and sporting clubs and other attractive recreational facilities. These attract large numbers of affiliate members.

Although the closure of several Sub Branches is occurring across the nation, the death of Sub Branches currently seems to be more prevalent in Western Australia.

Despite the eagerly awaited opening of a new ANZAC House, along with the vaunted Veteran Central, the fact remains that the Sub Branches are where the veterans are.

Veterans are mostly distant from St Georges Terrace; an important aspect that should always be deliberated. Veterans live where the Sub Branches are.

The recent Sub Branch Briefings conducted by RSLWA in the Perth CBD is a case in point. Those briefings could have been held in Rockingham, Bunbury or Joondalup! Or Mandurah, Albany or Geraldton!

The fact that RSLWA exists to support the Sub Branches (and not the other way around) should continually be in the minds of those working from ANZAC House. It is not always the case.

Several years ago a former RSLWA CEO cheerfully referred to Sub Branches as *the enemy*. It was an appalling attitude, even if it was

taken jocularly, but unfortunately that attitude at times still persists.

An example comes via way of the Osborne Park Sub Branch. For those who haven't visited the Osborne Park Sub Branch, it occupies a beautiful and unique heritage building on Main Street.

The President of Osborne Park Sub Branch phoned ANZAC House a few months ago to enquire if funding was available to fix a toilet door hanging from its hinges.

The initial response was "if you can't look after your own maintenance we will close you down". Having apparently realised it was an inappropriate statement, the response then became more conciliatory but by then, the old attitude had been revealed.

There are 36 RSLWA properties occupied by Sub Branches being considered for closure around the State, because of the cost required to maintain premises.

One is the Beverley Sub Branch, which occupies an RSL Memorial Hall that was bequeathed to the Sub Branch. The building, however, is now owned by RSLWA.

The Beverley RSL Memorial Hall has a commercial standard kitchen and bar facility but is not licensed. The Sub Branch hopes to celebrate its centenary next year.

There is a proposal to close Beverley and some other Sub Branches in that area and establish a regional RSL 'hub' in Northam.

However, the President of Beverley Sub Branch rightly points out that no one from Beverley is going to drive to Northam just to attend a monthly RSL meeting. His view is that once the RSL is gone from Beverley and other towns in the region, it will be gone forever.

In recent years RSLWA sold the historic premises of the Coolgardie Sub Branch.

The President at the time, Phil Chambers, purchased the building and went about recruiting 40 new members to ensure continuation of the Sub Branch.

It was a heroic effort.

Whenever the doors of the historic old building are open, the current Coolgardie Sub Branch President says that passing tourists ask to see inside the building.

And in Esperance, where there was a threat to close the Sub Branch premises, the RSL continues to have its own home.

The premises are located in a beautiful park on a prominent street within the CBD.

The closure of RSL premises is often the precursor to the eventual closure of the Sub Branches affected. One proposed solution, to lease premises in industrial estates, is largely an unpalatable one.

Given that our RSL forefathers fought for decades to establish the RSL on the main streets of our towns and cities, it is a retrograde step to hide the RSL in industrial estates.

The problem of Sub Branch closure is not confined to regional Western Australia or to maintaining premises. In the metropolitan area there are Sub Branches, with and without premises, with similar uncertain futures.

Many are taking positive steps. Nedlands and Claremont Sub Branches are working hard to increase membership. Subiaco and Shenton Park Sub Branches have recently amalgamated.

Victoria Park and City of South Perth Sub Branches are currently discussing amalgamation.

It is reported that most of the members of the Cambridge Sub Branch are in nursing homes but the President and Secretary are fighting hard to maintain an RSL presence in the neighbourhood.

The Cambridge Council, which understands the important part the RSL plays in the local community, supports them.

Vincent Council is providing support to the Mount Hawthorn Sub Branch, which is being reinvigorated by President Trevor Stiles.

For ANZAC Day 2020, the Mount Hawthorn Sub Branch and Vincent Mayor are producing an on-line commemorative service for viewing in



## Saving the Sub Branches By Geoff Hourn AM (Cont.)

nursing homes, hospitals and other institutions.

And in the small but energetic Cottesloe Sub Branch, which received its Charter in 1931, the annual Frederick Bell VC Memorial Lecture always attracts a full house at the Cottesloe War Memorial Town Hall. Outstanding lecturers have included Brendan Nelson, Mark Donaldson and, last November, Sir Peter Cosgrove.

The annual Frederick Bell VC Memorial Lecture epitomises how small Sub Branches make enormous contributions to local communities and the whole RSL.

It is hoped that the attitude from ANZAC House about proposed closures of premises is ambivalent. There is no doubt that there is currently more of a 'commercial outlook' than a 'community outlook' at ANZAC House when it comes to proposed closures.

It is an outlook cloaked in incongruity. The RSLWA Finance Committee has just magnificently raised the estimated \$23 million cost to rebuild ANZAC House and yet there is no money available to fix a toilet door in Osborne Park.

And RSLWA continues to increase annual Branch running costs while most Sub Branches languish.

When Graham Edwards was State President, with Phil Orchard as CEO, there were 12 paid RSLWA employees. Now, with fewer Sub Branches, there are 25 paid staff working at ANZAC House, with an additional position currently being filled.

It is apparent that the new edifice of ANZAC House is being complemented in size by a much increased RSLWA staff organisation.

There is now a Communications and Engagement Officer, a Director, Marketing & Strategic Partnership, a Veteran Liaison Officer, a Veteran Services Manager and many more.

All of which leads to greatly increased overheads to run RSLWA and increased workloads for voluntary Sub Branch Committees required to respond to the many new RSLWA deadlines.

Many Sub Branches regret that the days are gone when the State President would liaise with Sub Branch Presidents, the CEO would liaise with Sub Branch Secretaries and the CFO would liaise with Sub Branch Treasurers.

When the new ANZAC House is opened, a re-aligned RSLWA focus should be to support Sub Branches. Without Sub Branches RSLWA simply becomes superfluous!

Once ANZAC House is re-opened, RSLWA should define 2021 as 'The Year of the Sub Branch'.

A year focused on saving every small Sub Branch in Western Australia, on increasing membership in all Sub Branches, on working out business models to restore, maintain and develop existing RSLWA properties and make them viable entities with a suitable return on investment.

It will require a further close examination of the property portfolio audit report and close liaison with local governments, corporations and institutions throughout the State.

It will also require renewed efforts by the very talented Finance Committee for the next phase in the life of RSLWA.

**It is so important to keep our small Sub Branches alive and to grow all of our Sub Branches – because that is where the veterans are!**

### HIGHGATE 2019-20 COMMITTEE

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