

NOTES ON THE ROLE AND WORK OF THE AYM SECRETARY

The Association

The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Australia Incorporated is an Association registered in the Australian Capital Territory. It is comprised of the Regional Meetings and their members. Its Rules of Association provide that “the organisation, discipline and practice of the Australia Yearly Meeting, its committees and Regional Meetings are in accordance with the traditions of the Religious Society of Friends as set out in the *Handbook of Practice and Procedure* published by Australia Yearly Meeting and amended by that Meeting from time to time”.

The structure of the organisation includes the Yearly Meeting gathering held annually, the Standing Committee that meets in between the annual gatherings, committees appointed for specific purposes, and office bearers including a Presiding Clerk, a Treasurer, and a Secretary. Regional Meetings are also a vital part of the structure, and have their own share of responsibilities. In addition, there are affiliated bodies including Quaker Service Australia, The Friends School, Friends Fellowship of Healing, and Silver Wattle Quaker Centre. There are formal links between AYM and the international Quaker body called Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC), the National Council of Churches in Australia (NCCA), Aotearoa/NZ YM, the Australia Palestine Advocacy Network (APAN), the Australian Religious Response to Climate Change (ARRCC), the Independent and Peaceful Australia Network (IPAN), and Friends Peace Teams (FPT).

The AYM Office

The national office of Australian Quakers is under the aegis of the Secretary, who is expected to handle (a) the secretarial work of AYM, (b) the production and distribution of printed material, (c) maintaining communication with the Regional Meetings, (d) organising itineraries for visiting Friends to Australia, (e) maintaining international links, (f) being *ex officio* on AYM committees (except Nominations and Thanksgiving Fund), and (g) assisting with financial recordkeeping. There is also an expectation that the Secretary will ensure the effective holding of archives, and do outreach on behalf of the Society.

Over the years, this work has expanded greatly to include responding to the increased number of Quaker groups and agencies, handling the impact of new technology of communication, maintaining the websites, meeting the greater range of government requirements (e.g. safety and care of all involved, reporting on activities and policies), supporting Friends through the pandemic and other health challenges, moving to more frequent on-line meetings, and adapting to the complexity of financial accounting. Even the holding of YM gatherings each year has become more complex, and the Secretary has to give considerable assistance to the hosting groups. The Secretary has regular contact with the Presiding Clerk and Treasurer, as well as RM Clerks. There is an advisory committee to support the Secretary. Because of these developments, pressure of work is greater than is reasonable for the occupant, and is in need of review. More particularly, it is timely to assess whether the work should be shared through the addition of an assistant secretary.

Ways Forward

The tradition of the Society has been that it has largely relied on volunteers for its work under concern. This has included 'releasing' Friends for specific tasks, and supporting them financially and spiritually during such service. At the same time, Yearly Meetings around the world have found it necessary (as we have) to employ staff to carry out basic administrative functions that keep the Society afloat and ensure continuity of service. In the present situation, the following options might be explored:

1. Increasing the working hours for the Secretary.
2. Finding suitable people to support the secretarial work on a short-term basis for different specific functions (e.g. IT, outreach, YM gatherings).
3. Employing an assistant secretary who can be flexible in carrying out the full range of secretarial tasks as needed.

There is value in seeing the AYM office and a major resource for AYM and RMs, and therefore to make it more effective in carrying out its various roles. It is also important that the Society not rely on expecting volunteers to carry the basic workload that is needed for the Society to be a significant contributor to the many concerns Friends have. This suggests that another appointment similar to that of Secretary would be the best way forward. This would involve preparing a role description, seeking expressions of interest, interviewing applicants, and making an appointment for a set term (preferably several years, overlapping with the current Secretary's term).

To achieve this within a reasonable time frame, I suggest that the AYM AGM appoint a working/search group of several Friends, with relevant experience and knowledge, to consult with the existing office-bearers of AYM and of RMs and committees, and create a job description that can be used to begin the appointment process.

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8 November 2021