

REGIONAL MEETING RESPONSES TO DOCUMENTS IN ADVANCE FOR YM 2020

- The Clerking team for YM 2020 (Ann Zubrick, AYM Presiding Clerk, David Purnell YM20 Assistant Clerk, and Jacque Schultze, AYM Secretary) have considered the responses to the DIA reports.
- We offer the following summary to indicate which items we consider can proceed directly to the YM 2020 business agenda, and which would benefit from further RM discernment.
- We are also aware that RMs may wish to offer comments on some of the items we consider are ready to go forward.
- We invite your RM responses to the remaining items be sent **by 22 June** to the AYM Secretary.
- The full RM Responses can be found here: <https://www.quakersaustralia.info/regional-meeting-responses-dia>

A. Items which need further discernment by Regional Meetings

1. Handbook Revision Committee Report

The Clerks feel that RMs should be asked to make any further comments on the proposed changes to the draft sections of the Handbook, so that the YM business session can make a final decision.

(a) Standing Aside.

- There is general agreement to the proposed wording, but a specific change is requested.
- VRM suggests that the sentence “record that Friend xy wished to stand aside from the minute” have the further words “if they so desire”.

Do Friends agree that the words “if they so desire” be added?

(b) Accounts.

- There were no comments by several RMs on the proposed change.
- NSWRM suggests that the following words be added “for reasons of transparency or as legally required”;
- VRM prefers the original version be retained, and queries the need for a change.

Do Friends agree to “for reasons of transparency or as legally required” be added?

(c) Weddings.

- CRM, NSWRM, VRM, TRM accept the proposed changed wording.
- WARM would like to prefer the existing entry with the addition of words that indicate that it may be ‘one of our meeting houses’.
- QRM and SANTRM express the view that they would not accept a request to be married in the manner of Friends unless the couple was well versed in Quaker values/practice and/or the wedding was conducted under auspices of the RM.

Do Friends wish for these additions to be included in the proposed Handbook revision?

(d) Visitor Reports.

- All RMs agree with the proposal that a recommendation or statement of the person's suitability for membership be included in visitor reports on applicants for membership.
- TRM suggested alternative words "and offer the Meeting guidance to the applicant's readiness for membership" instead of "including a recommendation..."

Do Friends wish to include the suggested alternate words "and offer the Meeting guidance to the applicant's readiness for membership" instead of "including a recommendation..."?

2. Right Holding of Yearly Meeting Committee Report

- There is general agreement that the committee should be laid down, having completed its work.
- The recommendation for an ongoing YM Planning 'Expert' Committee is supported, as is the idea of local input as needed depending on the venue.
- The 'streamlining' of the preparatory stages for handling YM business is generally welcomed, with the comment from WARM that we need to be 'mindful of leaving enough time for hearts and minds to be prepared for business meeting discernments'.
- There is general support for 'Preparatory Sessions' to focus on items requiring discernment, and for information-sharing webinars to precede YM, although VRM wants some caution to be exercised so as not to preclude the sharing of information and concerns at YM business sessions.
- There is general willingness for trying new ways to deal with reports that might be handled outside YM itself, provided that there is not a drift to a hierarchy of discernment.
- The tabling of annual reports at the January Standing Committee is accepted as appropriate, as is the delivery of the 'State of the Society' address at the AGM in January.

The Clerks would like to invite further feedback from Regional Meetings before considering this report at YM 2020.

B. Items which can proceed directly to the YM 2020 business agenda

3. AYM Archivist's Report

- The RM responses indicate a keen interest in developing guidelines for the retention, safe storage and disposal of records relating to AYM, RMs and Local Meetings.
- Points that should be taken into account include separating policy statements from practical guidelines, identifying legal expectations for the storage of certain records (e.g. child protection), the forms in which records are kept, any different requirements for electronic records, which national records should go to the National Library.
- There is a suggestion that the AYM Archivist consult RM archivists, and others with appropriate professional experience, in the process of drawing up guidelines.

The Clerks will craft a minute for YM 2020 business session along these lines. There is no need for further discernment by Regional Meetings.

4. Children/JYF Committee and C&JYF Coordinators' Combined Report

- All RMs agree with the value of all-ages meetings for worship, children's meetings with stories and activities, and JYF meetings for worship and worship sharing. Whilst preferring face-to-face gatherings, Friends see value in exploring on-line opportunities when appropriate to engage those less easily able to be involved face-to-face.
- The newsletters from the Coordinators are welcome, and there needs to be checking on who is currently receiving them to ensure full coverage.

- There is a mixed response to the idea of national guidelines for children's and JYF activities, and draft of what is intended could be circulated for feedback.

The Clerks will craft a minute along these lines. There is no need for further RM discernment.

5. Earthcare Committee Report

- There is some hesitation about the idea of adding a 'simple reflective earth-caring moment' to the start of gatherings. There is however acceptance of the overall intention to remain alert to Spirit-led opportunities for thinking about the earthcare concern in all our meetings and activities.
- There is general support for the inclusion in RM annual reports details of earthcare activities that have affirmed the earthcare testimony.
- In relation to the notice that the current YM committee will lay down its responsibilities in a year's time, there are at present no offers for another RM to take up this concern.
- However, there is commitment to advancing the earthcare concern at RM and LM levels, and of creating more intergenerational opportunities for this work.

The Clerks will draft a suitable minute along these lines. No further RM discernment is needed unless any RM is led to offer to take on responsibility for the concern.

6. Friends Peace Teams Report

All agree that the recommended funding be approved - \$1000 annual grant and \$ travel subsidy of \$1000.

The Clerks will draft a minute for this approval.

7. Quaker Learning Australia Committee Report

- All RMs agree with the recommendation from the committee that an allocation of \$3000 continue to be budgeted for QLA.
- There is as yet no RM offering to take on responsibility for QLA when WARM lays it down in a year's time.

The Clerks will prepare a suitable draft minute for presentation to YM20.

If any Regional Meeting is led to take responsibility for QLA please let the Clerks know.

8. Quaker Peace and Legislation Committee Report

- Regional Meetings appreciate the Watching Briefs and Action Alerts issued by QPLC on peace-related themes. RMs see value in building ongoing links with QPLC, possibly through workshops, outreach and sharing of resources. QPLC's guidance and leadership in such initiatives will be welcomed. There might be occasions for joint zoom meetings involving QPLC and Friends in Regional Meetings.
- There is also agreement with the idea of a public statement issued by AYM promoting those in leadership positions in political, business and community life to promote cooperation and consensus in public life. The Prep session held by QPLC on 28 May led to a list of areas for potential peace activity among Friends locally and nationally, and QPLC will take these into account in its ongoing priorities. Issues of particular concern raised were – war powers reform, climate change and militarisation, human rights for Hong Kong, support for refugees, and protection of Aboriginal heritage. The newly-formed national Commission for the Human Future may be a valuable avenue for shared visions and action.
- At the Prep Session, QPLC was asked to prepare several draft statements on peace-building and

related issues for consideration at Yearly Meeting. One of these could commend political leaders for their cooperative approach to the challenges of the COVID-19 virus, and the encouragement of such positive working relationships in dealing with other issues.

- It was suggested that the final statements could be released publicly over several days.

*The Clerks will prepare draft minutes to bring to YM in support of these proposals.
There is no need for further discernment at this stage by RMs.*

9. Quaker Service Australia Report

- The proposed appointments to the Management Committee are accepted generally.
- Concerns have been raised by some RMs about the relationship between QSA and AYM since the restructure of QSA as a public company, and the role of the Linkages Committee, especially in reporting to AYM as well as QSA Management Committee. At the same time the Clerks believe that more time is needed for a proper response to the other concerns raised by some Friends and RMs, especially as QSA is fully engaged in a review by DFAT.

The Clerks will forward the names of the Management Committee nominees to YM for approval.

The Presiding Clerk is exploring a way forward regarding the other concerns raised by some Friends and RMs so no further Regional Meeting responses are required at this point.

10. Review of Standing Committee Report

This report has elicited a range of responses from RMs:

- CRM supports the report and recommendations, commenting that recognizing Standing Committee as an executive body does not change the broad-based nature of Quaker decision-making, with the provision that sufficient lead-time is available for appropriate consultation about agenda items among RMs and LMs. There will be some additional work for the YM Secretary in preparing for more SC meetings in any year.
- NSWRM accepts the recommendations in Appendix A and notes those in appendix B.
- QRM accepts the need to clarify SC's role to achieve greater efficiencies, and supports the use of on-line SC meetings. It has some disquiet on a few points – it prefers a phrase like 'we entrust SC to do...' to naming SC as 'executive committee'; it would prefer to emphasise the importance of all RM Clerks attending all SC meetings to ensure informed decision-making.
- SANTRM feels that calling SC an 'executive committee' does not clarify its role but may cause confusion. It supports the range of functions for SC listed in the review, and agrees that the addition of approving Handbook changes agreed by RMs should be added. Other points – SC considers confidential and sensitive matters, and this should be recognized; emergency decision-making should have a three-day time-frame and be open to all members of SC; does there need to be a delegation power for SC as proposed in the review.
- VRM does not support SC being called an 'executive committee' and says that SC carries out its role in accordance with the Handbook, including consultation with RMs. It thinks the membership of SC should not change, and that the wording about on-line meetings should read "additional on-line meetings of SC may be held so long as at least two face-to-face meetings are held". It would like more clarity about who decides to have additional meetings, and how often. It recognizes the need for adequate consultation among and within RMs, and thinks this would be helped by distinguishing what items are really for discernment rather than for information. The extra load on RMs is a concern. It does not support changing the Handbook without the usual process being used currently, and says that the Rules should change only after any changed procedure is well established. It supports noting the points raised in Appendix B for future discernment.
- WARM queries the rationale for the recommended changes, and prefers 'the flatter, non-hierarchical processes' of Quaker decision making. It supports recommendations 2,3,4,5,7 and 8. It does not agree

to any immediate change to the Handbook.

The Clerks feel that it is appropriate to defer consideration of the report (and the feedback already received from RMs) until after the end of 2020, to allow for reflection on the experience of how Standing Committee and Yearly Meeting work out this year. The Clerks will ask the authors of the report (David Purnell and Alan Clayton) to assess that experience early in 2021 with a view to providing an update to DIA for YM 2021. On this basis, the Clerks believe there is no need for further RM discernment, unless the RM believes a different course should be followed.

11. Safe Quaker Community Committee Report

- There is general agreement with the recommendations that updates on implementation of the policies be included in RM annual reports.
- Regional Meetings are actively working to inform Friends of the policies, and are incorporating the SQC contacts within their pastoral care structures.

The Clerks feel that there is a clear support for the SQC policy and procedures, and will draft an appropriate minute for YM 2020. There is no need for further consideration by RMs.