

6.1 National membership in orienteering in Australia

The 2015 Annual Conference asked Orienteering Australia to explore further potential options for a national membership structure. Some options were put forward to the 2016 AGM. Following discussion at the AGM and subsequently by the Board, the Board is now putting forward a specific proposal for consideration.

The existence of a single national membership database offers a number of benefits both from the orienteering perspective and to other stakeholders. From the internal perspective, administering a single database as a shared service would relieve states of the need to do so themselves, while at the national level, it makes it easier for Orienteering Australia to monitor national membership numbers and make reports as required; having easily verifiable membership numbers at a national level also potentially makes us more attractive to funders and to sponsors. This is especially important given that the Australian Sports Commission appears to be moving towards a more rigorous model of verifying membership numbers, which is likely to feed into ongoing funding decisions. It also allows Orienteering Australia to communicate more effectively with its members.

At the state level, in addition to relieving states of some administrative workload, the experience of some other sports is that a move to a national membership model has been viewed favourably in applications for state-level grants because of the message it sends about the way the sport is looking at its governance and organisational structures. A national database would also allow remaining hard copies of the Australian Orienter to be distributed centrally¹, removing another area of workload from State Associations.

We do not believe a national membership platform would make any visible difference to existing members. However, a single national entry point is likely to be simpler for newcomers to orienteering, especially those unfamiliar with internal state/club structures.

The ASC is strongly in favour of greater integration between state and national sporting organisations. Whilst their primary interest is in ensuring that all levels of the sport are working towards similar strategic goals/directions, they are strongly supportive of any initiatives which further strengthen links between state and national bodies.

A number of sports have moved to a national membership model in recent years. For example, in triathlon (a sport held up by the ASC as a model), joining simultaneously makes you a member of Triathlon Australia and your nominated state association. (Club membership is separate, but being a member of a club gives one a substantial discount on national/state membership).

The option recommended by the Board

The Board's recommendation is that a national membership database operates as a shared service, with a single point of entry, but individuals continue to join (in a formal sense) their State Associations and clubs, and membership revenue goes to the States/clubs as applicable.

Under our proposal, states will be able to retain their existing membership structures, and retain control over fees for each category of member.

¹ Although some states may not wish to do this if they combine the Australian Orienter with their own mailouts (e.g. state newsletters in those states which still have them).

We will also be proposing amendments to the OA Constitution to make it clear that one becomes a member of Orienteering Australia as a result of becoming a member of one of the constituent State Associations. (The amendments will use different wording to describe the constituent Associations themselves). This should not require any amendments to State-level constitutions.

It should be noted that Eventor already, in essence, provides the necessary functionality for a national membership database.

Remaining issues to be resolved if national database supported in principle

Various issues, mostly relating to implementation, will still need to be resolved if a national database is supported in principle at the 2016 Conference. These include:

- It would need to be determined how much work needed to be done to maintain a national database), whether this work would be handled through volunteer(s) or paid staff, and if the latter, what cost would be involved and how it would be funded. Advice from Victoria (which has used Eventor for memberships for some time) is that there is a significant workload involved, but much of that is either related to the complexity of the current Victorian club/state membership structure, or involves work which would probably continue to be devolved to the state level (e.g. sending welcome letters to new members, following up non-renewals and sending contact lists to newsletter editors).
- The process to provide state and club administrators whatever reports they need (e.g. contact lists for their members), preferably without needing any intervention from the national administrator(s), will need to be resolved.
- The extent to which state membership is/is not integrated with club membership would need to be considered. (The role of clubs varies considerably from state to state, as do their fees (if any)). New South Wales and Victoria, which, historically, have had had clubs with a substantial financial base and substantial independence, have both moved to a model of integrated club and state membership in the last few years.
- There are currently a number of individuals who are members of multiple clubs and/or state associations. If this is to continue to be supported, the database would need to be able to support this (state-level Eventor-based membership databases do this so this should not be a major issue).
- The information to be collected and retained for a membership database would need to be standardised. It is possible that state laws on incorporated associations may impose requirements in some states that do not exist in others (e.g. a requirement to record the year in which a member first joined²), although in practice these requirements may not be followed now. Such requirements would need to be documented.
- A system would need to be put in place for ensuring that membership fees are paid to the correct State. Advice from Craig Feuerherdt is that now that all states have Paypal accounts it should be straightforward to set this up.
- It would need to be considered whether we should also try to integrate the coaching and controller accreditation databases into the system. If this could be successfully achieved it has the potential to remove a further administrative workload, and contribute to more effective communication with accredited coaches/controllers, which would be expected to help contribute to the ongoing professional development, and retention of, individuals in those roles.

² This was a requirement of the ACT Associations Incorporation Act when I was OACT secretary in the early 1990s; I do not know whether it still is.

Timetable for implementation of national membership

Should a national membership system be supported in principle by the 2016 Conference, work will then need to be done on finalising what is to be done with respect to the implementation issues mentioned above.

A final proposal, including details on those issues, will then be brought to the June 2017 Special General Meeting. Should the SGM vote in favour of that proposal, our intention is that a national membership system would be introduced in time for the 2018 membership year.

Blair Trewin
President
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Appendix 1 - Existing membership structures within the states

A wide range of membership structures exist within the states. Whilst OA is not currently proposing that states change their membership structures, this paper will give an indication of the range of membership structures which exist in Australia.

Beyond the standard senior and junior individual memberships, the following categories exist in some states:

Family	In NSW, SA and Tas, covers a maximum of 2 seniors and any number of juniors In ACT and Qld, can also include dependent students (under 25 in Qld, under 26 in ACT) Restrictions (if any) in WA not clear from website This membership type does not exist in Victoria
Remote associate	Exists in SA, Queensland, NSW and WA for country clubs (NSW membership form doesn't say anything about remoteness being a requirement for eligibility). Levied at a lower rate by OA.
Associate groups	For schools and similar organisations. Exists in Vic, Qld and SA.
Concession	SA, Tas and WA offer concessions to juniors and health care card holders. WA extend this to family memberships where at least one of the seniors hold a concession.
Introductory rates	Queensland has a lower rate for first-year members. Several states have part-year rates for new members joining mid-year.
Early bird rates	Queensland has a discount for early renewal.
Vouchers	SA has a scheme where the SA Government provides vouchers which can be used by juniors towards membership of a sporting club. This provides a discount to those eligible from family membership (or free membership for juniors, as the voucher value is greater than the SA junior membership fee).

It is assumed that all states have life members (or at least provision for them), but this was not checked. It is believed (but has not confirmed) that in some states this may also involve a discounted family membership for the family of the life member (where applicable). OA has provision for states to have a membership type for registered officials but no state is believed to be currently using it (Victoria has done in the past).

Victoria has a new membership structure where one joins OV by joining an affiliated club, with the membership fee being a relatively low OV component (\$30 senior, \$1 junior) plus a club fee. Australian Orienteer subscription is separate (at least from OV's point of view).

Outside Victoria, senior membership fees are in the \$60-70 range in most states, except ACT (\$90) and Tasmania (\$50), while juniors are \$40-50 except in Tasmania (\$25) and WA (\$30). Families are \$80 in NSW, \$99 in SA and \$105-125 in the remaining states.