

Company: Spinal Life Australia
Title: Annual General Meeting
Date: 14 November 2022
Time: 11:00AM AEDT

Start of Transcript

Gyl Stacey: Good morning everyone. My name is Gyl Stacey and I am Chair of the Board of Spinal Life Australia. I would like to show my respect and acknowledge the Traditional Owners of this land on which the meeting takes place. I would also like to pay my respects to Elders past, present, and emerging.

I have been elected today by the Directors to chair this meeting, with the exception of item of business number 4, the election of Directors. Deputy Chair Mark Dillman has been elected to chair this part of the meeting.

On behalf of the Board, thank you for taking the time to attend today's AGM either in person, by telephone, or online, and have your voice heard as one of our valued members. So, wherever your journey is from today, welcome. I'm also joined by some fellow Directors: Mark Dillman, Michelle Wilson, Gerard O'Brien, Rebecca Tweedy, Carol Taylor. I'm also joined by our Company Secretary Peta Perring, Spinal Life CEO Mark Townend, our Chief Operating Officer Natalie von Snarski, and our Chief Financial Officer Danielle Ready, who are here to assist in answering any questions you might have today. Our auditors KPMG are also attending in person should there be any questions related to our financial statements.

There are some procedural matters I would like to address before we formally open the meeting. Firstly, for those of you attending today's meeting virtually, I am pleased to confirm we have the ability for closed captions on today's video stream. Through this interactive platform, you can vote and submit written questions as well as listen to the presentations and view the slides as we progress through the meeting.

Below the slide, you can see links to meeting documents including our Notice of Meeting and the Annual Report. You will also find an online meeting guide which contains step-by-step instructions on how to use the platform, including how to vote and ask questions. If you have any trouble using the platform at any time, please check the guide or call the Link Market Services support team on 1800 990 363.

The online platform that we are using today has been tried and tested for many other AGMs. However, in the unlikely event that we need to take a short break if we are experiencing any technology issues, we may need to adjourn to another time or place. Please keep an eye on our website for any further details. A recording will be available on our website by close of business today if any members lose connection during the proceedings. Only authorised recordings are permitted of this meeting. If you are joining us via telephone or here at the Spinal Life office in Woollongabba today, none of this applies but there are still guidelines that we will ask attendees to abide by.

As this is a meeting of members of Spinal Life Australia, only members or proxyholders are entitled to participate in the meeting, which includes asking any questions. By asking a question, you are also consenting to being part of the recording. In the interests of good order and timeliness, I ask that questions posed are relevant to the nature of business of the meeting as set out in the Notice of Meeting.

While questions can be raised at any time during the meeting, questions will not be answered until the last order of business where relevant questions will be received and read by the Company Secretary to be answered by the Chair of the meeting where possible.

We'll make sure we respond directly to your questions after the meeting if we cannot answer your question fully or if we do not get to your question during the meeting. If you wish to ask a question and are onsite with us today, please advise a staff member. If you are attending the meeting online and wish to ask a question, you can find this button at the top right or at the bottom of your screen. For those of you listening over the telephone, we will advise when questions are open towards the end of the meeting so please keep an ear out for that.

If you have any queries in relation to individual or personal matters, please contact us. These questions will not be put to the meeting. Any questions we consider offensive, defamatory, or that include coarse language will not be read out or responded to. Please start submitting your questions online when you are ready or advise a staff member if you are attending today. We look forward to your comments and questions and answering them later in the meeting.

As there is a quorum present, I declare the meeting open and welcome you to Spinal Life Australia's 2022 AGM. Please note that only members or their nominated proxies can vote on resolutions put to this meeting. Employees of Spinal Life Australia who are members are not eligible to vote today. Voting at today's meeting will be conducted online with computers available for people attending the meeting in person to use if required. I now ask Link Market Services to open the software for online voting by members or their proxies.

The Notice of Meeting has been sent to all members either electronically or by post as required under our constitution and the *Corporations Act 2001*, and if there are no objections, I propose that the Notice of Meeting be taken as read.

I would now like to share with you some more about the Board's activities over the past financial year before handing over to our CEO Mark Townend to speak.

The past financial year has been a year of positive change for Spinal Life despite the challenges of COVID and the economic situation worldwide. We have seen the ongoing effects on our workforce and attracting and retaining casual staff has been tremendously difficult. The Board and the leadership team are driving and supporting initiatives that will improve conditions for our staff, particularly our personal support workers. This will continue to be a focus of our efforts over the coming months as we know this an ongoing challenge not only for Spina Life but for the entire disability services industry.

As a Board, it's important to maintain the right balance of being financially responsible while continuing to expand services to meet customer needs and respond to changes in the sector. Throughout the year, we have also worked hard to grow our services, especially with the opening of the Healthy Living Centre here in Brisbane. It's fantastic to have a range of health and wellbeing support services in one place to provide a truly holistic support service.

This Brisbane centre joins our flagship location in Cairns, which I was lucky enough to visit this year when I travelled to Far North Queensland to meet our members. The aim was to share more about Spinal Life's activities and plans and hear about some of the specific issues that are important to people living in and around Cairns, Townsville, and many points in between.

The Board will continue to focus on seeking feedback for our customers and members to inform not only how we grow our services but also our advocacy efforts. The Board and our CEO have continued to review our strategy to ensure Spinal Life is on the right track for success. We are well positioned to continue to provide relevant services to our members while remaining financially viable. Plus, we are building resilience for the challenges that are no doubt up ahead.

Through it all, our mission remains unchanged: that is, to enable people with spinal cord damage to live an accessible, equitable, and empowered life. I would like to thank my fellow Directors for volunteering their time to benefit Spinal Life. I look forward very much to working together as we continue to lead the organisation in the future.

Thank you to the CEO and the leadership team and to all our employees who have once again demonstrated such commitment in their roles despite the challenges of the last year. I would like to thank our customers for continuing to use our services. We look forward to continuing to support you with our quality services now and into the future. Thank you to our members for being involved, especially by lending support to our advocacy campaigns, and finally, I would like to thank our network of volunteers who are at the heart and soul of our organisation.

I'll now hand over to our CEO Mark Townsend to speak. Thank you very much.

Mark Townsend: Thanks, Gyl. Good morning. We're extremely proud of the achievements of this year, especially in the current environment, continuing to work towards our mission of supporting people with spinal cord damage to take life back. We opened our second Healthy Living Centre - and some of this will be a little bit of a repeat because when you come second, the Chair always gets those first headliners - but certainly we're very proud of the Healthy Living Centre open here in Brisbane and being able to provide services to our membership here in Brisbane.

Developed in response to the feedback from our customers struggling to attend appointments and all other different services and different locations elsewhere. We've got the allied health team and we're slowly building that up. Here you'll find them all under one roof, occupational therapy, physiotherapy, nursing, assistive technology, and again heads towards our strategic plan of a one-stop shop, not to mention our state-of-the-art fitness hub and fantastic exercise physiologist to lend a hand.

In Cairns, our Healthy Living Centre has become a hive of activity and [headed up] under Margaret and the team up there, it's a great ambassador for SLA in Far North Queensland. We're so pleased to see people being able to enjoy their holiday and relax with accommodation that is truly accessible for them all and their families, and I certainly encourage anyone in the room or anyone online, if they can get a chance to go to Cairns, make sure they go and visit the SLA, and hopefully stay there.

Another strong financial outcome despite the ongoing impacts of the pandemic [result] - I've got to say we spent \$1 million in January of this year towards our PSWs to ensure they continue to provide service - \$1 million more than normal - to ensure that actually attend to the services and provide to our clients and customers. That was really important, and that's what's different between a mission-based organisation and a profit-based organisation. The Board saw the need and we met the need despite the financial burden. That's what we're here for.

One of our key focus areas is increasing support for our frontline employees, personal support workers, and we're in the middle of an EBA process to even help that. We're offering more training, more benefits to encourage them to come onboard and stay with us and grow their careers. Just recently, I just saw the figures; we're down less than 30% of the turnover we used to be, so the turnover - we've got a lot more stable staff and the turnover has reduced by a huge amount, which is great.

Advocacy, continuing advocacy work for better access inclusion. This year we included the Disability Doesn't Discriminate campaign and to end age discrimination for people over 65 years of age unable to access the NDIS. Our petition gathered more than 25,000 signatures and we had many conversations with political leaders all over the country. Originally, it was aimed to run basically in Queensland; it ended up going national and it went right across the country. A class action is now being put together by a law firm and hopefully that will address the discrimination once and for all.

We're also continuing to advocate for improved accessibility in tourism and the general community, and I can tell you, the Premier might have announced it a week and a half ago, but it was due the advocacy team here at Spinal Life who actually provided the information about accessibility and tourism and the benefits of it, and that the Accessible Tourism Year in 2023 came from Spinal Life Australia to the Premier's Department and she announced it last week. So good work to Ross and his team.

We are also continuing to - looking forward to further developing our Accessible Australia app and seeing more of the reviews out of there. Please continue to share feedback on what matters most to you. I truly believe what sets Spinal Life apart as a service provider is the advocacy work we do and it's making a real difference.

Looking to the future, we want to continue to grow our one-stop approach in services to meet the customer need; important to remain financially stable and strong so we do have those opportunities. It's also about ensuring we are being innovative and always seeking improvements. This year, you'll see - it will be released actually in early 2023 - a digital application. You'll have the choice of the old-style ring up, get the service to provide the rostering, or there'll be a very digital focus as well, and we'll hopefully be in that market early in 2023.

You'll also see this organisation be part of the supply business chain where we think at the moment the supply to our clients from current suppliers both in consumables and equipment is bad customer service overall; we want to make sure that's improved, and Spinal Life will disrupt that.

As Gyl mentioned, we continue to guided by our critical success factors to deliver the best possible outcomes. There's more about our successes in *The Advocate*, keep up-to-date, in our Annual Report, and on our website. I would like to thank everyone at Spinal Life, the whole team from our frontline PSWs to our therapists, behind-the-scenes admin staff and everyone else in between. No matter what your role is, I thank you for the contribution this year. We're all cogs in a little factory and we're all necessary.

I thank the Board and Gyl for showing strong leadership throughout the year and continuing to support the executive. It's really important, especially in the last couple of years with the pandemic, that you have a Board that's committed. They're all volunteers, they spend time, they take the responsibility seriously, and they're actually agile in their decisions, and that makes sure we can move with the times and get things done.

I look forward to an exciting year ahead, and I hand now back to Gyl.

Gyl Stacey: Thank you, Mark. We'll now move on to the formal items of business set out in the Notice of Meeting. A copy of the minutes of last year's AGM held on 25 November 2021 have been made available to members on our website. Unless there are any objections or questions, the minutes will be taken as read and approved. Thank you. The minutes are approved.

The next item of business is the receipt and consideration of the financial reports and the Directors' and Auditor's Reports for the financial year ending 30 June 2022. Accounting firm KPMG were commissioned to complete an independent audit of the reports for this last financial period. These reports were made available to our members on our website prior to today's meeting. Members should note that these reports are not subject to a resolution today. Are there any comments or questions in relation to those financial reports or the management of the Company?

At this point, I would like to hand over to our Deputy Chair Mark Dillman who will be acting as Chair for the next part of the meeting, which relates to the appointment of Board Directors. Over to you, Mark.

Mark Dillman: Thanks, Gyl. The next item of business is the election of our Directors. In accordance with the rules set out in the constitution, four candidates have submitted themselves for election to the Board. To assist members in their considerations, a profile for each of the Directors was provided in the Notice of Meeting and on the website. As there are three positions available and four candidates, according to our constitution a ballot of members must be held. The three candidates with the greatest number of votes cast in their favour at the AGM will be duly elected.

From late October, members were contacted by email or post with information about how to participate in this online meeting or cast their ballots for Directors by nominating a proxy to vote on their behalf. The four candidates standing for election to the Board are Mr Martin Hume, Mr Gerard O'Brien, Gyl Stacey, and Michelle Wilson. As the meeting this year is a hybrid meeting, the candidates for election will not be making any presentations.

To cast your vote in any of today's resolutions, you can flick edit card below your name at the bottom of the screen. Remember to only vote yes for three of the candidates listed and vote abstain for the other one. If you have another member in your household who also wishes to vote, you can click get a voting card at the bottom of the screen; they will need to enter a separate member's number to verify their membership.

This online voting system will be available for use until the close of the meeting. If you are onsite here at Woolloongabba with us today, a staff member will assist you to access a computer if required - they are down the back. After the close of the meeting, no more votes can be cast by members or their proxies. Following the close of this meeting, Link Market Services will tally the ballots for each candidate for Director and make the results available on our website by close of business today.

I will now hand back to Gyl who will chair the remainder of the meeting. Over to you, Gyl.

Gyl Stacey: Thanks very much, Mark. This year, members are also asked to vote on a Special Resolution to amend the constitution of Spinal Life Australia. The proposed changes are described in more detail in the Notice of Meeting and on our website. This proposal relates to the amendment of the constitution to allow elected Directors and appointed Directors to strengthen our organisation by ensuring we have the right skills on our Board to most effectively lead Spinal Life. I ask members and their proxies to cast their votes on this resolution now. The resolution will be left open until the voting closes at the end of today's meeting.

In other business, no changes are proposed to the annual subscription.

As mentioned earlier in today's meeting, we will now take questions. Are there any questions in the room? There are no questions in the room. Are there any questions over the phone?

Operator: Chair, there are no phone questions.

Gyl Stacey: There are no phone questions. Are there any online questions?

Unidentified Speaker: There are no online questions.

Gyl Stacey: Thank you, [Natalie]. There are no online questions. If there are no other questions, I will now move to close the voting platform and close the meeting. All voting results will be made available on our website by close of business today.

As there is no further business, I declare the meeting is closed and voting has now ended. Thank you for joining us today and I hope that you all stay safe and are going to enjoy the upcoming Christmas and holiday period. Thank you.

End of Transcript