



9 July 2025

Newsletter No 1 for 2025

Over the last few weeks, we have held a Board Meeting, Annual General Meeting, and our National Conference. In addition, the Board has dealt with quite a bit under the banner of 'business as usual'.

In May 2025, the Board made the strategic decision to disestablish the Chief Director role and redistribute its functions across a suite of specialised committees. This decision aimed to reduce dependency on a single individual, balance workloads, and be more responsive to the future needs of Clubs and Players. In the subsequent weeks we have advanced the redistribution of work with the establishment of a Fair Play committee, to be chaired by Julie Atkinson (previously known as complaints); reaffirmed Matthew McManus as chair rules and regulations; reaffirmed Bridget Willcox as chair of Events; progress on an appointment to the teaching and learning committee. We have not yet made progress on the appointment of a Head Director other than in the last few days we have issued an expression of interest for the role.

On the question of roles both Anne Barrowclough and I will be stepping down on the 31st December and are not eligible for re-election. This early notice is to allow people who want to contribute to the future management of our game to consider the role. In the coming months we will be issuing the usual nomination forms.

Board meeting 13th June

A special welcome to Peter Newell, attending his first board meeting. Peter has represented New Zealand, been a member of the Wellington regional team, President of the Wellington Bridge Club and a member of the Wellington region. Peter consults to Inland revenue having earlier been an employee of the organisation and other government agencies. He brings to the table fast experience and a common-sense approach.

It was pleasing to see a further uplift in membership, but we are still down on overall membership as of 31 December 2023. Whilst there has been significant emphasis and activity lifting numbers there is still an underlying challenge with behaviour. The National Conference held 14th and 15th June specifically dealt with this issue and is reported on below.

The Board approved the constitutional changes required by Inland Revenue. Submitted to the AGM for adoption.

Board members met on the 12th June to consider actions to bring the budget under control, with expenditure exceeding revenue.



The Board acknowledged the contributions of Fergus More (Honorary Solicitor) and Graeme Stout (member of the CDD Committee) who have both recently retired from their respective roles.

~50% of Clubs have now re-registered under the 2022 Incorporated Societies Act. Those clubs intending to re-register have until the 16th April 2026 to do so. If you do not re-register you will be struck off the register and will be required to redistribute your assets in accordance with your constitution. You are urged not to leave the process too long. It does take time to fully consider the running of your club.

Under new reporting standards organisations are now required to prepare and issue a Performance Statement. This deals with both financial and non-financial items. It is designed to provide comparatives and inform members of the progress the organisation is making. We will add a section to the toolkit but to provide some guidance in preparing our Performance Statement for the AGM this is what we included-membership, grades, summary of progress against our objectives (13 in total), tournaments, congress, international competition.

Progress with the toolbox continues with over 80 items already in the toolbox. The toolbox can be found on the website under clubs. It is divided into 4 sections- Governance, Policies and Procedures, Operations, and Marketing Material. We are delighted with the initial response that clubs are finding the toolbox useful. Keep an eye on it as new items will be loaded from time to time.

Annual General Meeting

The meeting was held F2F and online with 11 clubs in attendance.

Members approved an amendment to the constitution as required by Inland Revenue to preserve our tax status. Documentation has now been filed and accepted.

The Performance Statement (financial and non-financial) was approved for the 9 months ending 31 December 2024.

Paul Hangartner was reappointed as auditor.

As in the past we acknowledged the contribution from a large number of people- regional committees, international committee, manager of events, trustees of the Foundation, members of the CDD Committee, Tournament scheduler, presenters of the bridge zone, contractors and staff, and anyone else that I may have inadvertently omitted.

National Conference- Strengthening Connections and Building Bridge for the Future

The conference provided an opportunity for regional committees, members of the Board and Management to come together. The day and half allowed time to discuss a range of subjects raised by the regions and progress topics on the Boards agenda. On the second day we were able to workshop the thorny issue of retention.

Set out below is a summary of matters discussed.

1. Regional Championships

The trials for FY25 were a mixed bag with general apathy for the event. There have been calls for the event to continue F2F and other calls for the event to be online. The cost of the event (2.5 days) is expensive at \$30,000+, plus any cost borne by the players. Historically the event

played immediately prior to congress with players gathering on the last evening to watch and comment on vu-graph. For FY26 the meeting agreed on a hybrid model with the round robin played online. A final will take place on the Friday immediately before the start of congress. A plan for FY26 will be released in the coming months.

2. Director Training

Whilst a few new directors have been accredited a call remains for more training. With the decision to dis-establish the chief director role it has been necessary to find a future pathway. Post conference we have had an expression from Allan Joseph and his team. Allan will join the teaching and learning committee with a focus on training for directors and scorers. We want to ensure the pathway for club directors is as easy as possible. We are not in favour of exams, per se, preferring a simple form of accreditation. Also, we have asked the teaching and learning committee to explore the use of an app as a simple tool for club directors. We must also accelerate pathways for tournament directors.

3. Congress 25

Planning is well underway. Even though we are 4 months out from Congress the level of entries is encouraging. We already have over 50 teams entered. The event is structured for players of all levels. Clubs are encouraged to promote the event, recommending/encouraging players to give it a go. I know from experience the event is a lot of fun (bridge and social time) and an opportunity to make lifelong friends.

4. Business Planning and Budget Process

Over the last few years, the organisation has run in deficit. Whilst not ideal, small deficits in the short-term are manageable. We are focused on rebuilding numbers and participation following Covid, plus doing more around retention. Planning and budgeting for FY26 will be completed by 30 November.

5. Marketing

The team shared everything happening in this space and the tools now available to clubs (see toolbox). Social media reach has expanded which provides an avenue for new members. We have also received a lot of media attention (written and radio). The item "bridge is the new tinder" which was a tongue and cheek item was picked up by the media here and overseas. In monetary terms the item was worth ~\$130,000. We have made an application to the Palmerston City Council for congress sponsorship. We should know the outcome in the coming weeks.

6. Tournament Review

The review in conjunction with the regions is now complete and we have a plan for FY26. The clubs and regions will have more flexibility. 3 weekends will be set aside for online. National events will continue to be a mix of F2F and online. The plan will be released in the coming days.

7. Toolbox

(refer to the comments above)

8. Wellington Region

For years the Wellington Region have derived revenue from regional events and from interclub. The level of funding has allowed them to be self-sufficient, reducing the dependency on NZB for cash. We are keen for other regions to explore this approach, freeing up funding for other initiatives to strengthen and grow the game.

9. Scoring Packages

The Board reaffirmed it will not own or endorse any scoring package. Scoring providers need to manage their own commercial offering.

10. Database

Historically we have discussed the advantage of a central database. The Board is conscious that it does not want to usurp the space held by clubs to communicate with their members. However, we are aware much of our communication does not reach players because it does not get beyond the secretary or players do not visit the website. Our ability to reach a larger number of players raises the prospect of greater sponsorship. It also fosters improved communications. Registering on MyNZB will provide a tool for broader communications. Of course, if players don't want to receive communications there is the ability to unsubscribe.

11. Annual Reports

(See comments above re Performance Statements)

On the second day there was a focus on retention with the those in attendance breaking into 3 groups. Their findings are tabled below.

Group One:

- Realistic to expect we won't keep more than 50% of those in lessons
- Culture of improvement - partnership issues, could split learners into two groups (more social, more focused on improvement) and structure sessions accordingly
- Take care with deciding who partners newer players
- We do have some cultural norms (like ACOL) that makes things more difficult but are unlikely to change. We can adjust our session-times to make them shorter for those who prefer more social play.
- Support clubs to create a different range of experiences
- Ensure beginners have more time learning before we feed them to the sharks in the main room
- Regional committees can have a role to support clubs with this

Group Two:

- Map the learner lifecycle journey - who you want to get in, manage people's expectations, support material during and after lessons
- Retention is higher when couples or friends or siblings comes together
- Retaining members later in their journey - learner support drops away, how to keep the support going (call those who haven't shown up)

- Invite learners to do lessons again the next year - to help with new learners and to further embed their learnings
- Do clubs know they have a problem?
- Committee overload is a problem - rope in people to do part-roles and buddy up (train up); ensure the club knows the role and importance of the committee, shoulder-tapping
- Many committees of smaller clubs are focused on the week ahead, growth not always possible for all clubs - how to help them have a plan
- Support clubs with measurement of learners/stayers - Nick (Waikato Bays) happy to do that with clubs in his regions
- Regional committee to have a 'Retention Officer'
- Bad behaviour - directors need to be a bit less officious with newbies, buddy up with existing members, educate newbies about not taking it personally, how to deal with difficult characters,
- Ensure clubs are thinking about learners as a 2-year project
- Focus on social connection - very important

Group Three:

- Barriers
 - For joiners - time of play and length of sessions, not social enough, takes too long, too hard, too serious are examples of why people leave.
 - For staying (hours of play, too many boards)
- Solutions:
 - Socialisation
 - Results are now being provided more quickly than before, providing less social connection time between
 - Have regular teaching sessions throughout the year (not just once or twice a year) - spread it out
 - Create more tools for self-learning
 - Protect beginners from unsolicited views/coaching
 - More social events

In general conversation there were a range of ideas tabled.

1. "lets talk about it" which is an initiative in Wellington. A chance to improve your game in a relaxed, chatty environment. Experienced players are on hand to guide, offer advice and give

tips. A new learning topic each week. It is a session of social bridge that is open to all clubs.

Afternoon tea of scones, jam and cream is provided. A cash bar

2. Different coloured pens for beginners. Be kind.
3. Newsletters to be encouraging and welcoming.
4. Be open to new ideas and ways.
5. Be open to sharing experiences
6. Promote a culture of learning.
7. Foster connections
8. Help with partners.
9. Be open, welcoming and supportive.
10. Shorter sessions
11. Make it fun and rewarding
12. Deal with inappropriate behaviour.
13. Stamp out bullies
14. Share experience
15. Find ways of dealing with - the game is too hard, I am overwhelmed, I am embarrassed, I feel I am not supported, it is an unfriendly environment, it takes too much time, not my crowd, too rules focused, not friendly, not social enough, apathy to grow.

Cheers Allan