

Dear members,

We are writing to HAAG members to explain why the Committee of Management believes our Constitution needs to be amended.

Background

In 2019, HAAG members voted to update our Constitution. This resulted in changes to the Committee of Management, reducing the number of members to 9 from 12, and extending the term to 3 years instead of one year. It also changed the way that they were elected to “stagger” the terms, so that only three people were up for election at each AGM (instead of previously, when all 12 were elected every year). It put a maximum term of 9 years, unless a special resolution is passed.

These changes had some unintended consequences. Sometimes all the “office-bearing” positions (that is, the Chair, Deputy Chair, Secretary and Treasurer) are up for election at the same time. It does not allow for moving between ordinary members and office bearers without election by the members, and it doesn’t allow for succession planning.

HAAG’s Committee of Management has sought legal advice from DLA Piper, the lawyers who helped us in 2019, to help us resolve these issues. The Constitution is our governing document, so it’s very important we get it right!

Election of Office-bearers

The biggest change we are proposing is the way we elect office-bearers on the Committee. We are proposing that the Committee of Management itself appoint people to office-bearing positions after the AGM, instead of direct election by the membership. This change will allow us to plan for succession, for example, by preparing the Deputy Chairperson to become the Chairperson. It prevents the current unwieldy situation from occurring, where an Ordinary Member steps down in order to nominate for an Office bearing position, and then their position is made vacant, requiring an appointment or election into that vacancy. It allows people who are in office-bearing positions to step into an Ordinary Member position if they want to.

We understand that this is a change for HAAG, which has always had direct election of office bearers, including the Chair. Some members may be worried that this represents a shift away from HAAG's ways of working and values. The Committee supports and recommends these changes. We strongly believe that the broader HAAG membership should have the opportunity to participate in the organisation, and we encourage you to do so. The Committee must always remain accountable to the HAAG membership. However, we believe that this change will allow for a clearer process and more flexibility. The Committee itself will be best placed to decide who has the required skills to be appointed into office-bearing positions.

Filling vacancies on the Committee

Currently when a Committee member resigns, the Committee usually appoints one of the Committee advisors into the vacancy. That person then takes up the term of the person who has vacated the position, which may be two years or more. We want to prevent unelected people from being on the Committee for longer than is necessary. We are proposing a change that would require people filling vacancies on the Committee to go to the next AGM for election, and then their own term of office would commence from that date. We believe this is more accountable to the membership.

Life membership

There is currently a limit on life memberships to no more than 4 people. We are proposing that this limit be removed.

We urge you to consider these proposed amendments to the Constitution, and vote in favour of them at the next General Meeting.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Treasurer Karen Abols at karen_abols@hotmail.com