

ASSOCIATION OF PUBLIC SECTOR SUPERANNUANTS INC.

MINUTES OF GENERAL MEETING

1:00 pm Monday 25 October 2021

1. Welcome

President James Vandenberg acknowledged the traditional ownership of the Kurna people and expressed respect to their elders.

James welcomed 52 members to the meeting, and particularly welcomed member Bob Carmichael as guest speaker.

2. Apologies and introductions

Secretary Brenton Pain noted apologies from Peter Fleming, Elaine Baskett, Jess McMahon, Leonard Carr, Orlando Maiolo and Charles Tucker.

3. Reports

Ann Nankivell advised that she had been in contact with former Secretary Christine Venning, who was living in residential care in Woodside. Ann mentioned options for a visit by a small number of people to present Christine with her Life Membership Award.

Treasurer Michael Evans briefly noted the encouraging financial position of the Association, and expressed his appreciation for donations by members.

Michael reported that Ray Hickman was unwell in hospital with acute inflammation of the gall bladder, and that the level of Ray's involvement with the Association would be unknown for the time being.

James outlined recent activities, reporting that

- the business name PS Superannuants was now registered to the Association;
- the Association's membership in Victoria was now in excess of 80, and steps were being taken to set up a sub-Committee to guide and conduct member activities in Victoria;
- the first meeting of the Superannuation Advisory Group, convened by Ray, had been held at the end of September, and had gone well.

James noted that a reply had been received from the SA Treasurer, declining to support a bereaved partner continuing to receive the full pension for an interim period after the death of the pensioner. James advised that the letter said Pension Scheme members are generously treated compared with Triple S retirees, and that this was an opportunity to go back and explain that the pensions are good, but not better than the Superannuation Guarantee.

James reported that there was room for 20 more members to join in the luncheon at the Metropolitan Hotel on November 17th, with a good menu and good prices on offer, and invited contact from anyone who might be interested in coming along.

James advised that Brenton would not be nominating as Secretary next year, and expressed his appreciation of Brenton's contribution. James pointed to the need to recruit more members to the Committee and asked members to please consider nominating for the Committee in 2022.

4. Guest Speaker: Bob Carmichael

After a brief introduction by Brenton, member Bob Carmichael spoke about "how you get to be a diplomat", drawing on his experience as an Australian diplomat and Trade Commissioner in Indonesia, the Philippines, South Korea and Italy

Bob explained the different kinds of diplomatic representation Australia has at overseas embassies and consulates, and how attractive an overseas posting had seemed to a young man working for the Export Development Grants Board in Adelaide in the 1980s. Asking why his application for a Trade Commissioner position was unsuccessful produced the advice that trade policy experience was necessary. Eventually Bob got a job with the Australian Trade Commission and moved the family to Canberra. Suddenly he was a trade policy expert! Accompanying the visiting Chinese delegation on a trip around Australia in 1987 was followed by a trade mission to Shanghai, then a temporary posting to China, a promotion to Seoul, and a three year posting to China.

Following Tiananmen Square and the cancellation of all China postings came an appointment to Milan. There were lots of document certifications, tourists in trouble, the collapse of the former Yugoslavia, walking past the Duomo and La Scala each day, weekends in Venice, and long hours working up trade opportunities, such as Bradmill selling lots of denim into Italy, with an initial million dollar order.

A four-year posting to the then very different culture of Korea and its largely closed market followed, with much work focused on why Korean consumers should have access to imported Australian wine and food, not just European, leading to big orders of Hardy and Brown Brothers wine. With Kim Il-sung in the ascendant in North Korea, Seoul within artillery range, and weekly air-raid practices, the local Korean staff were quite stressed.

Subsequent appointments were to the volatile and comparatively poor Philippines, with the trade focus on aid-financed construction projects, where getting paid could be quite challenging for Australian companies, and then on to Djakarta, with Indonesia a major trading partner.

Bob illustrated with slides how life in Indonesia was for him and his family, with very nice accommodation and facilities, good colleagues and absorbing work. There were also with frequent security briefings, and sometimes, especially in more remote non-tourist areas, an awareness of hostility of the kind a casual visitor to Bali would not encounter.

Bob Carmichael's presentation then turned to the bombing of the Australian Embassy in Djakarta on September 9th 2004, resulting in 11 deaths, many injuries and great property damage. A two-tonne truck bomb had been exploded immediately in front of the building where the Ambassador and staff, including locally engaged, were working. Bob's photos vividly showed the scale of the physical damage.

Bob outlined his and others' immediate experiences of the bombing, and the effect it had on them, and the initial and longer-term responses to this awful incident. A visibly shocked Prime Minister Howard and Foreign Minister Downer visited Djakarta the next day, the latter saying he wanted everyone to smell the gum leaves. Embassy staff were evacuated for an additional two weeks' leave back home in Australia. It was observed that the life of a diplomat was not all cocktail parties.

Bob discussed his subsequent roles with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, including as Investment Commissioner for the Pacific, getting Australian companies to make business investments in Pacific nations, to build up their economies and their exports to Australia.

Bob's absorbing presentation was followed by questions and answers about cultural and religious prejudice and tolerance; who claimed responsibility for the bombing; attitudes towards the local people who were killed and injured, and the current security situation.

Brenton led members in thanking Bob for his talk, and presented him with a bottle of wine to mark the Association's appreciation.

Meeting Closed

The meeting closed at 2:30 pm approximately.
