

Open Letter from Alan Turner dated 4 November 2016

TO: All Bridge Clubs Affiliated to New Zealand Bridge Incorporated

Re: Proposed Restructuring of NZ Bridge Inc

As, Treasurer, longstanding Board member, player, supporter and former international representative of NZ Bridge it is with deep regret that I write this letter. However I believe that the Bridge Clubs, as members of NZ Bridge, have the right to know what is happening within the Board of NZ Bridge and that I have a duty to advise them. I am also inviting Clubs to advise the Board of their wishes concerning the proposed restructuring.

The Board intends to change the governance of NZ Bridge to a model which I believe is financially unsustainable. This change includes disestablishing all existing staff positions and employing a CEO, an Administrator and an Event Manager.

I am concerned about this and I am opposed to the change. I have made it known that I consider the Board does not have a mandate for this change.

I am more concerned, however, that the Board is now planning to make this change as soon as possible and does not appear to be at all concerned about lack of mandate. I have been told by one board member that the changes will be irreversible.

NZ Bridge has a term deposit of around \$276,000. This is money we have saved over the years as a reserve. The Board wish to access this term deposit to meet (at least in part) the costs of the proposed restructure. I have made it clear that I will not agree to that. As a result I have been threatened with removal as Treasurer.

A unique opportunity arises in March 2017. The positions of at least 4 or 5 Board members, including the position of Chairperson, will be available for election. Nominees will have the opportunity to stand on the basis of whether they are for or against the restructure and members can vote accordingly. To me this would be a democratic, honest and ethical way to decide whether or not to restructure.

My experience on the Board during this year leads me to conclude that the current board is not best placed to make decisions regarding significant and irreversible changes. I set out in the schedule to this letter various events which have led me to this conclusion.

The 2016/17 business plan for NZ Bridge is available on the NZ Bridge website. It sets out NZ Bridge's strategies and tactics for 2016/2017. There is no mention of the restructure that the board is now planning to make. The business plan also sets out the values of NZ Bridge which include "honesty and integrity" and being "open and accountable". I question whether the Board is currently upholding the values of NZ Bridge.

In September the Christchurch Bridge Club wrote to NZ Bridge expressing concern about a resolution of the Board of 14 July 2016. The resolution indicated that the strategies of the board will be implemented by a Chief Executive appointed by the Board. Christchurch Bridge Club asked a number of questions of the Board. To the best of my knowledge these queries have not been answered. A number of clubs raised similar concerns at the AGM. There were no clubs supportive of the appointment of a Chief Executive. The meeting was told that debate on the issue was not appropriate at the AGM and (as reported in Congress Bulletin #2) that reviewing governance was a regular event and that plans for restructuring were at a very preliminary stage with no timetable in place.

Whilst that may have been true at the time of the AGM (24 September) the restructuring plans are now proceeding apace. An HR consultancy firm has already been approached and on 27th October advised the Board:

"...we would be happy to write the three job adverts and job descriptions at a flat fee of \$1000.00 per role. This is a reduction from our normal fee of 1/3 of our base fee. If you send through the information you have on the three roles we would aim to get these completed by end of day tomorrow."

I am also concerned that existing employees are under a great deal of stress because they have known for some time that the Board is considering restructure but they have not yet been consulted by the Board about the restructuring process.

All I ask is for the Board to defer the restructuring unless it has a mandate from its members (being the affiliated clubs). The Board needs to know the wishes of its members. Surely the Board will listen to the majority view. The question is whether the Board should proceed with the restructuring immediately or whether it should wait until after the March elections.

I ask that each Club advise the Board within the next two weeks whether the Club wishes the restructuring to occur immediately or whether the Club wishes any restructuring to be deferred until after the March elections.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alan Turner', with a horizontal line underneath.

Alan Turner

Board Member / Treasurer
New Zealand Bridge

cc: All Regional Committees of NZ Bridge Inc
The Chairperson of NZ Bridge Inc
The Board Members of NZ Bridge Inc

Schedule

Events referred to:

1. During the year the Board has held at least 6 “private” meetings. At such meetings the Secretary (who has a constitutional duty to establish, maintain and be responsible for the minutes of all Board meetings) and the Chief Director (who has a constitutional right to attend all Board meetings) were excluded.
2. On the 23rd September (the day before the AGM) the Board held a private meeting to which a lawyer was invited. In the course of the meeting the lawyer provided advice on the question of controlling what would be discussed by delegates at the AGM especially the issues raised by the letter from the Christchurch Bridge Club.
3. In October the Board needed to hire an independent facilitator to facilitate a private meeting of the Board. This was at a cost of approximately \$2,000.00.
4. At a subsequent meeting a Board member resigned verbally only to be persuaded to remain a Board member until the elections in March 2017.
5. The Chairperson advised Board members by email on 29 October that a Skype call was needed (giving notice of 33 hours) to discuss a detailed list of items in advance of a formal Board meeting set down for 2nd November. In this email, amongst other things, the Chairperson suggested the sacking of our current accountants, the removal of Alan Turner as Treasurer and the appointment of an experienced interim CEO.
6. Formal Board meetings have become almost meaningless because the real business of the Board is being conducted in the “private” meetings.