

The WIA, technology and the challenge of change

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Your WIA needs you! This article prefaces a comprehensive membership survey that is important to the on-going existence and development of the Institute. The WIA faces challenging financial and operational imperatives that necessitate changing the way we do things.

Considering this, the WIA Board has taken two key decisions – to raise membership fees from 1 July 2014 and to provide a digital edition of *AR* magazine from the July issue, in addition to the printed magazine. In the meantime, the Board needs a snapshot of your demographics, interests and views.

The financial imperative

The Objects of the WIA, specified in our Constitution, are broadly to educate and encourage new radio amateurs, be an effective advocate for amateur radio nationally and internationally, to protect and enhance the operating privileges for radio amateurs, and to provide relevant services to members.

At the time of formation of the National WIA in 2004, the fee structure was set to the lowest fee charged by any of the then seven divisions, so that no members would be disadvantaged on becoming a member of the National WIA. The Institute operated at a small profit in the years following nationalisation, and increased membership fees in 2011 to maintain that financial position in the face of rising costs.

In the past two years the Institute has suffered trading losses, mainly due to falling sales revenue and increasing costs, especially in relation to *AR* magazine's declining advertising sales revenue and its increasing

printing and distribution costs.

The situation is not serious, as the WIA has ample financial reserves. But, in order to properly represent the long-term interests of members and the Australian amateur radio community, especially in the rapidly changing technological and regulatory environments we face, and to continue providing the many services we do, the WIA's trading position needs to be restored.

In the face of these circumstances, as announced above, the WIA Board recently took two key decisions – to raise membership fees from 1 July 2014 and to provide a digital edition of *AR* magazine from the July issue in addition to the print edition, for the time being. The details are set out in the breakout panel on page 30.

Unlike Norman Lindsay's famous "Magic Pudding", which you can cut and come again forever, the WIA's resources are finite, and doing nothing – continuing with "business as usual" – was not an option.

Here's an outline of how the Board arrived at these decisions and the reasons for undertaking the membership survey.

Opportunities for cost savings

The WIA has already achieved savings over 2013, especially in relation to Directors' Board meetings, which are now held monthly by teleconference rather than the much more expensive quarterly face-to-face meetings. The Institute has subscribed to the GoToMeeting service, which cost \$480 last year (*gotomeeting.com.au*). This has proved both convenient and beneficial. Monthly

teleconferences, rather than quarterly face-to-face meetings, have helped the Board to enact WIA business faster and more efficiently.

The Club Grants Scheme has been postponed until further notice, a further saving of about \$6000 per year. It would be good to return to a situation where the Scheme could be restored.

There may be other small areas of saving, but these are incremental at best and, even when taken together, would not make the adjustment required without seriously cutting back on important functions like our international representation at the ITU and the IARU – a very slippery slope to follow after building and maintaining a strong profile internationally over many decades, which has established the Institute as a key player in many influential policy areas of global radio communications administration. For example, led by the advocacy of the late Michael Owen VK3KI, and backed by the IARU, the Morse qualification for HF band access was dropped by administrations the world over and new "Foundation" licences emerged over the early-2000s, moves that are still progressing across the globe. Internationally, the WIA was involved in the introduction of the WARC bands more than 30 years ago, as well as the 136 kHz and 472 kHz bands more recently. For the past few years, the Institute has been working towards getting agreement among many administrations for a 5 MHz amateur allocation. And that list only covers a number of highlights.

The elephant in the room is always going to be the publication of *AR* magazine; costing about

\$105,000 just to print and distribute it in 2013, it is the largest single WIA expense.

Faced with a similar financial situation, the NZART changed its monthly magazine *Break-In* to a bi-monthly publication. The ARRL and the RSGB, in considering their future operational strategies, have each embarked on providing digital versions of their magazines, *QST* and *RadCom*, respectively.

Possibilities for increasing income

Membership fees provide the majority of the WIA's income, with a much smaller income stream derived from specific service charges along with Bookshop and other merchandise sales.

There is no opportunity to increase income from the License Assessments and the Callsign Management functions that the WIA performs on behalf of the ACMA because they have to be performed on a cost-recovery basis. That is, the WIA cannot derive a profit from them. These services are provided to the amateur radio community under a Commonwealth of Australia Deed of Agreement. Under the terms of the Deed, the WIA is prevented from deriving any net financial benefit from that work. In addition, Australian law also prevents any services provided by the WIA on behalf of the Commonwealth to be linked to membership.

As the WIA cannot financially benefit from the work it does on behalf of the ACMA, we cannot use that income to cross-subsidise other WIA activities, and we cannot link the provision of Licence Assessments, Certificates of Proficiency and callsigns to WIA membership. The WIA is audited yearly to ensure that these services comply with the terms of the Deed.

The WIA views this work it does on behalf of the ACMA as a service to Australian amateur radio generally. There has been no move to increase charges for

these services. As advised in the President's Comment in the January/February 2014 issue of *AR*, the Board and our Registered Training Organisation (RTO) are working on streamlining the processes and procedures to reduce costs and to accelerate providing exam candidates with their results, Certificate of Proficiency and callsign within a short timeframe. This is a high priority in the WIA's ACMA Liaison work.

Another avenue for increasing income is to expand the range of our publications. The Foundation Licence Manual has been a remarkable success and will be continued because of the role it plays in education and licence assessments. The Annual Callbook is pretty much an "institution", although on-line services and resources are eating into its market. Going beyond these, the Board and the Publications Committee are keen to develop plans for other publications suited to the Australian amateur radio market, particularly for Foundation and Standard licensees. However, while developing these products will in time become a useful and necessary addition to the WIA's commercial activities, they can only be an adjunct supporting the WIA's objectives, and not the main game.

The WIA Bookshop is a valued service, and a small number of WIA publications, like the Foundation Licence Manual, are significant sources of merchandise revenue for the service. However, taken overall, the Bookshop is a small contributor to WIA income and a marginal operation, especially given the amount of work and effort required from volunteers. The Board believes that, by rearranging how the bookshop works, there are opportunities to both lower the cost to members of some publications, and also to improve the service. Book sales will never be a major source of revenue that can supplement membership fees, as

these operations do for the ARRL and the RSGB.

Newsagent sales of *AR* magazine are rightly considered a proper channel for public promotion of amateur radio and the WIA. However, with sales at around 400-500 copies per issue, it will never be a big earner. Although the Institute receives less than half the cover price for copies sold, the income is nevertheless welcome, all the same. The cover price has been \$8 since the January/February issue of 2012. Last year, the Board raised it to \$9.70 from the January/February 2014 issue, which puts it in the same price ballpark as other slim, hobby interest magazines on the newsagents' shelves.

Membership fees

So we come to membership fees. The Board is generally aware of the age profile of the membership and your diverse social and employment backgrounds. Hence, there was concern among – and considerable discussion between – Board members that a considerable increase in membership fees may discourage too many potential members from joining and existing members from renewing, and thus be counterproductive. To some extent, any fee increase is likely to have a level of discouragement for some people, anyway. A number of scenarios to increase fees were canvassed – such as increasing the membership fees annually in small increments over the next 4-5 years, or only increasing fees a modest amount and reviewing the situation later. But it was clear that such measure would not help the bottom line soon enough, nor necessarily provide a firm foundation for the future.

Considering all that, the Board has a fiduciary duty (i.e. financial duty) to ensure the continued viability and development of the organisation, which weighed-in to the decision to increase the fees.

The increase for full membership is \$15, equal to 18.75%.

For concessional membership, the increase is just \$10, equal to 14.3%. The other membership grades have been similarly adjusted and then set at sensible dollar amounts. There is no escaping that, in percentage terms, the change to the full membership fee is a substantial increase. However, in dollar terms – an increase of \$15 for full membership – it's not great compared to the broader costs of living – three beers per year, a modest bottle of wine, less than a packet of cigarettes (for the remaining members that smoke, these days), and so on. The Student membership fee remains unchanged at \$35, preserving the original purpose of setting this fee level as being an encouragement to students to join and a concession to their generally impecunious circumstances.

To ease the burden of paying membership fees all in one go, the Board has introduced quarterly membership payments by direct debit, for those who would find that system more convenient.

The WIA Board saw that this policy change meets the need to make it easier for people to renew their membership, which may contribute to reducing non-renewals, as well as encouraging more people to join the WIA in the first place.

The Board felt that, undoubtedly, a proportion of current members would balk at paying a full membership of \$95 per year for a variety of reasons – affordability, perceived value for money, competing demands from other needs and wants, etc. Introducing a quarterly payment direct debit scheme should contribute toward mitigating that.

Other than restoring income levels to more than cover costs, there is another benefit to an increase in membership fees. The Board concluded that the increase of just \$15 per year would enable the introduction of a digital edition

of *AR* magazine in parallel with the existing paper edition for a period, giving sufficient time to test the acceptance of the transition to publishing only a digital edition.

The next most effective way to increase income from membership subscriptions is for the WIA to find a persuasive way to retain existing members, while recruiting new ones. The WIA has always had a small membership churn rate of a few per cent, which varies in a minor way from year to year. Fortunately, the level of non-renewals in 2013 was an improvement on previous years.

No doubt there is a variety of reasons for membership churn, including lifestyle changes, loss of interest in the hobby, loss of interest in the WIA and, naturally, a proportion becoming silent keys. And there are always some who just don't get around to renewing! The Board will implement a program in 2014 to address non-renewals, while recruiting efforts are continued.

The on-line future

From the introduction of the digital edition in July, members who have provided us with an up-to-date email address will receive an email each month when the digital edition is available for download via a secure log-on. Those of you who are ARRL members with a 'digital' subscription will already have experience of this sort of facility.

As *Amateur Radio* magazine is the most significant tangible benefit of membership, the WIA Board is concerned to see that, in the transition away from the exclusive printed edition, the opportunities for value-adding are maximised for the benefit of members. The digital edition of *AR* magazine affords opportunities for value-added services not available in the print edition, such as live hypertext links to websites and on-line videos, for example. In addition, supplementary content can be provided as an adjunct to the digital edition, such

as larger-scale diagrams, software, printed circuit board patterns etc. – even (gasp!) digital format advertising. Authors, of course, will be able to take advantage of this, particularly.

While these new features and facilities are all 'on the table', it is anticipated that the digital edition of *AR* will develop over time. Don't expect it to be fully formed from the get-go.

It is possible that, sometime down the track, the WIA's member-exclusive publishing may morph from just a monthly magazine as at present to providing a wider range of information at more frequent intervals, which may also include updates to already-published material. On-line magazines are increasingly moving to a continuous publication model, with news updates and new articles being published almost as they arrive. Two examples that come to mind, in RF technology areas, are RF Globalnet at www.rfglobalnet.com, and Wireless Design Online at, www.wirelessdesignonline.com Both these publications are regularly updated, about once or twice a week, with email notifications sent to subscribers. They are both very rich in on-line content.

As digital production and distribution technology develops, the Institute will be in a position to evaluate and choose to exploit new developments as they become available.

Membership Survey 2014

At this juncture in the National WIA's history, to form a foundation for future planning for the Institute, the Board felt it essential that a snapshot of the membership's demographics, computer capabilities, interests and views on a range of relevant matters be canvassed.

The Membership Survey is provided in two forms: **an on-line survey – which we encourage as many members as possible to use**, and a paper form – published

in this issue as the centre four-page sheet. The latter provides for members without internet access.

The on-line application can be found here: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/WIAMemberSurvey>

The Survey closes on 14 April 2014

The Board looks forward to obtaining the results and sharing them in *AR* magazine and on the website and news broadcasts later in the year.

Thanks to Vice President Chris Platt VK5CP for assistance in compiling the questions and creating the on-line survey.



MEMBERSHIP FEES FROM 1 JULY 2014

Full member, 1-year	\$95.00
Full member, 5-year	\$451.00
Concessional member, 1-year	\$80.00
Concessional member, 5-year	\$380.00
Student member, 1-year	\$35.00
Overseas member, 1-year	\$105.00
Overseas member, 5-year	\$500.00
Additional Family member (no AR), 1-year	\$36.00
Additional Family member (no AR), 5-year	\$170.00

Full and Concessional Members are now able to opt to pay their annual fees quarterly by direct debit, when joining or renewing.

Full member, 1-year, paid quarterly	\$24.00 per quarter
Concessional member, 1-year, paid quarterly	\$20.00 per quarter

If your renewal comes up in the meantime, take the opportunity to renew before the price rise! Quarterly payments at the current annual fee rate can now be arranged through the WIA Office for membership renewals that fall due before 1 July.

Amateur Radio Digital Edition

From 1 July 2014, *Amateur Radio* magazine will be available to members as a portable document format (pdf) file from the WIA website, accessible using your WIA member number and member password. PDF files can be read with the free Adobe Reader application. If you don't already have it, Adobe Reader can be downloaded from www.adobe.com/au/

A sample PDF version of *AR* magazine is available here: <http://www.wia.org.au/members/armag/pdf>

The digital edition will be available to members in addition to the print edition of *AR* magazine for at least two years, through to 30 June 2016, by which time it is expected that the WIA Board will make a decision about continuance of the print edition.

Likewise, the print edition of *AR* magazine will continue to be sold through newsagents until the WIA Board decides otherwise. From the January/February 2014 issue, the cover price increased to \$9.70.



Press Release

Wireless Institute of Australia Merit Awards

The Board of the WIA at its discretion makes awards to members for their contribution to Amateur Radio. These awards are usually presented at the WIA's Annual Conference and AGM. The Board is now calling for nominations.

The nomination form is available for download on the WIA website. When completing the survey, you

are not required to suggest which award should be made. The Board will assess each nomination, and decide which awards, if any, it will make.

Clearly it's best to include as much information as you can so as to inform the Board, and please do keep it in some sort of chronological order. Also include information about any other

awards they may have received. It's important to recognise the work done within the hobby, so please do give some thought to nominating someone you know of.

Nominations close on 31st March, and awards will be announced and where possible presented at the WIA's 2014 AGM and Conference on the Sunshine Coast on May 16-18.

