

NATIONAL RIFLE ASSOCIATION

FINAL

THE GENERAL COUNCIL
Minutes of a Special General Council Meeting
held by Video Conference Call
on Saturday 14th November 2020 from 10.00am

Present:

Chairman Mr D Lacey

Members:

Mr GK Alexander
Mr HRM Bailie
Cdr NJW Benstead
Mr JPS Bloomfield
Mr N Brasier
Mr G Burns
Mr CM Brooks
Wg Cdr DP Calvert
Dr AMW Cargill Thompson
Mr M Charlton
Mr M Cotillard
Mr DC Crispin
Mr A Dagger
Mr CES Dickenson
Mrs A Gran
Mr J Harris
Mr RS Kenchington
Mr JM Kynoch
Mr GAE Larcombe
Miss SS Lohmann
Mr J Longhurst
Mr D Lowe
Dr J Marsden
Mr MF Martel
Mr A Reynolds - Treasurer
Mr B Ritchie
Mr R Roberts
Mrs K Robertson
Mr D Stimpson
Mr NF Thomas
Mr IR Thomson
Mr MK Townsend

In attendance: Mr A Mercer - Chief Executive
Mrs G Thatcher - Secretary to Meeting

Apologies for absence: Mr M Charlton, Mr PAE Charlton, Mr PR Coley, Maj. Gen IC Dale, Mr J Harper-Smith, Wg Cdr CJ Hockley, Mr M Maksimovic, Dr J Martin, Brig. WJ O'Leary, Mr M Pountain, Mr AJD Saunders, Mr I Shirra-Gibb, Mr C Steele-Benny, Mr N St Aubyn, Mr S Wallis, Dr AP Wolpe, Mr G Trembath, Dr JD Warburton, Mr MP Watkins

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The Chairman declared the meeting open and welcomed all members attending.

1. G635 – APOLOGIES

Apologies were received as noted above.

2. G636 – DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chairman requested that all members declare any conflict of interest at any relevant point of the meeting.

3. G637 – SPECIAL BALLOT TO APPOINT THE DISCIPLINARY BODY

- 3.1. The Chairman informed the meeting that the purpose of the meeting was to approve the holding of a ballot for the reappointment of the Disciplinary Body, in accordance with the resolution presented in the meeting's agenda.
- 3.2. The ballot will be held using the Mi-Voice online platform, previously used successfully for the General Council elections in May 2020.
- 3.3. The Secretary General confirmed the following nominations had been received:

Lawyer Members

Robert Sayer, Charles Brooks, Leslie Christy, William Mott, Nick Hinchliffe, Richard Vary, Rosalind Wiltshire, Richard Jeens and Sheila Mott.

Non-Lawyer Members

Anthony de Launay

- 3.4. JH remarked that the briefing paper stated there were vacancies for two Non-Lawyer members, but only one candidate has been put forward so does that leave the Disciplinary Body not properly constituted.
- 3.5. The Chairman responded that it does mean there will be one vacancy remaining for a Non-Lawyer member on the Disciplinary Body. The Secretary General added that the consequence of that needs to be considered, however it is important that the Lawyer Members of the Disciplinary Body be appointed in any case.
- 3.6. The Chairman does not propose delaying the process and would like the meeting to agree to continue with the election for the posts for which there are candidates.
- 3.7. ACT asked for confirmation that the Non-Lawyer members need to be members of General Council and whether anyone on the call knew of anyone who would be prepared to put themselves forward.
- 3.8. The Chairman confirmed that non-Lawyer members do need to be members of General Council, and that according to the Second Schedule, any possible candidates should have put themselves forward 14 days before this meeting. There may be some objection to late candidates being included in the ballot and questions around the validity of the election process.
- 3.9. General Council could decide to hold a subsequent election to fill any outstanding vacancies.
- 3.10. ACT remarked that if the Meeting felt it was more important to have a fully constituted Disciplinary Body, waiting a few weeks for additional candidates could be considered.
- 3.11. CESD remarked that it appears that the Disciplinary Body is only considered properly constituted if it has the same number of Lawyer and Non-Lawyer members. There does not seem to be any scope for operating with one person short. Should one member cease to be a member of the Disciplinary Body, it ceases to be constituted until another election is held, which can take at least a month to process. Consideration therefore needs to be given to a change to the Second Schedule to ensure the Disciplinary Body can remain effective should one person no longer be a member.

- 3.12. The Chairman thanked CESD for raising a good point. It has highlighted that there needs to be more flexibility in the Disciplinary Code, such as a minimum number of four Lawyer members and four Non-Lawyer members would allow the Disciplinary Body to be effective. The Chairman will raise with Council a change to the Disciplinary Code to introduce a quorum to allow the Disciplinary Body to operate with fewer than 12 members, rather than the Second Schedule, which requires agreement by the full membership at an AGM.
- 3.13. JPSB added that paragraph 8e of the Second Schedule allows General Council to fill a vacancy on committees and Disciplinary Body at any time, subject to prior notification of the vacancy. There is some flexibility to find an additional Non-Lawyer member after this current process has been actioned.
- 3.14. The Chairman thanked JSPB and supported getting that process underway and asked General Council members to consider whether they would be willing to serve, or know others who would be willing to serve as Non-Lawyer members on the Disciplinary Body.
- 3.15. AD asked if the process was artificially restrained by quoting a particular technology such as Mi-Voice voting system, or should a suitable electronic voting system be used.
- 3.16. The Chairman responded that the Mi-Voice system had been used successfully in the past by General Council and it seems sensible to use a technology that the Association is familiar with, rather than use this as an opportunity to trial a different provider.

No further questions were raised.

- 3.17. The Chairman asked the Meeting to pass the resolution set out in the notice of meeting to use the Mi-Voice system to hold the election with the candidates available. The Meeting approved and the resolution was passed.
- 3.18. The Chairman asked the Meeting to approve the time during which votes may be cast and put forward 14 days as has been used for postal ballots in the past. The Meeting agreed.

4. G638 – REVIEW OF MEMBERSHIP OF THE PRINCIPAL COMMITTEES

- 4.1. The Secretary General presented his paper to the Meeting and informed them that:
- 4.2. The terms of office for the principal committees have been reviewed to ensure they are properly formed and it has been found that 4 Members of the Shooting Committee and 3 Members of the Membership Committee have been serving the committees for longer than their maximum 3 year term without re-appointment.
- 4.3. The Secretary General proposes holding an election to ensure the committees are properly constituted, as laid out in the paper.
- 4.4. The Secretary General has spoken to all 4 members of the Shooting Committee and the 3 members of the Membership Committee and all are willing to seek reappointment.
- 4.5. A proposed timetable for nominations has been circulated to all General Council members should this paper be accepted by the Meeting.
- 4.6. The ballots will be held by either electronic or paper method, but this is yet to be decided.
- 4.7. ACT asked whether the cost of using Mi-Voice would be disproportionately expensive for two small elections.
- 4.8. The Secretary General remarked that the most cost effective method will be used – a small ballot is c.£200-300 and that cost needs to be balanced with the staff, postage and paperwork costs.
- 4.9. The Meeting when asked, showed their preference for electronic voting.
- 4.10. CD remarked that the Association must ensure that these circumstances do not happen again.
- 4.11. The Secretary General responded that more attention needs to be paid to the terms of office in future. There have been some issues filling the vacancies which has been a distraction. This is a salutary lesson about how important it is for staff to pay attention to the details in the Second Schedule.

5. G639 - THE ROLE AND FUNCTIONING OF GENERAL COUNCIL

- 5.1. A paper submitted by Alex Cargill Thompson and Silke Lohmann was presented to the Meeting.
- 5.2. The Chairman asked ACT and SL to clarify the reference in their paper to a negative attitude towards the NRA within the Shooting Community and some background to that statement to understand the context.
- 5.3. ACT remarked that he should have added the word “perception” into that statement. ACT confirmed he was referring to comments made on the social media channels such as Facebook and the SaveBisley.com website, and while it may only be a few people being very vocal, a few people still have the potential to cause harm.
- 5.4. ACT agreed that the NRA does do a lot of good things, however there are occasions when particular issues seem to grab a lot of attention and as a result, tend to eat up a lot of people’s time and goodwill.
- 5.5. More generally, it doesn’t feel as if General Council (GC) is as useful as it might be and suggests that sentiment and perception is perhaps an area the members of GC can be helping with, amongst others.
- 5.6. The main point is that looking at the role of GC as defined in the Second Schedule, the role is for GC to advise and make recommendations to Council, and provide representation of the membership of the Association. It feels that most of GC’s activity is meetings which tend to be reviewing papers detailing things which have been done some months ago. ACT recognises that reviewing records of other meetings is an important role for GC, given that they are often out of date, there should be an opportunity for GC to be contributing constructively thereby improving how GC can work towards advising the Council both proactively when concerns are raised through GC, but also have Council use GC as a sounding board.
- 5.7. ACT added that members of GC have signed up to the declaration of confidentiality, so most items should be able to be discussed during a meeting but some confidential items could be discussed for advice with selected members of GC in confidence.
- 5.8. There are two questions raised in the paper:
 - 5.8.1. How can Council make better use of General Council; and
 - 5.8.2. How can General Council better assist Council and otherwise fulfil its role according to the Second Schedule
- 5.9. ACT would encourage consideration of both of those points, in both a strategic sense and a detail level sense.
- 5.10. ACT suggests that initial thoughts be gathered today with a view to making this an agenda item at the next General Council meeting in February for greater consideration.
- 5.11. SL added that there is more opportunity for GC and Council to engage more quickly through technology such as Zoom.
- 5.12. The Chairman thanked ACT for confirming that the negativity is based around Facebook and SaveBisley.com and not the view of the wider NRA membership.
- 5.13. ACT is happy to reword the statement but doesn’t want to lose the reference. This is intended to be a constructive document. The Chairman is happy with the clarification.
- 5.14. MKT remarked that he has always told people that if they have any issues, instead of putting it all over Facebook, they should put their views forward either to GC members or the NRA staff and put their point across constructively and initiate positive change. He also remarked that people should treat the staff with respect and consideration.
- 5.15. BR remarked that a large number of shooters in Scotland do not associate themselves with the NRA and there are very few individual members of the NRA in Scotland, the majority being members of affiliated clubs. BR would like GC to look at the perception of the NRA and try to get across the fact that it isn’t the Bisley Shooting Club and it is the National Rifle Association. The membership structure should encourage that, so if you are a member of an affiliated club, you should feel you are a member of the NRA, and not only if you are an individual member of the association. A better understanding of the NRA needs to be promoted to the regions and make the affiliated clubs and members feel a part of the association.

- 5.16. AD remarked that it needs to be recognised that social media can be quite disproportionate across the shooter base, and we should consider using and exploiting that medium to capture and recognise the good things the NRA do. The NRA should use the website and Facebook pages to help promote the NRA and counter the negative posts on social media.
- 5.17. The Chairman thanked AD for the good point raised and perhaps the NRA can use those to better effect.
- 5.18. AM remarked that the NRA has been tempted to 'challenge' some of the posts on social media but we need to be very measured and receive criticism, no matter how ill-founded, and not get involved in 'unseemly spats'. We do need to be more positive and give a measured view. We do allow critical postings on the social media channels of the NRA.
- 5.19. DC believes that there is a general perception that some people consider suggestions made by GC to Council just get in the way, rather than GC providing advice to Council. DC also raised the point of negative comments being made, that he is hearing a lot of things about the acquisition of BSG and what it cost the NRA, and whether the rumours are right or wrong, it is causing a lot of upset amongst the shooting community. To be specific, the last GC meeting produced accounts showing £221k of legal fees for the BSG acquisition, but that was just in 2019, and 2020 will show another £200k, and another figure of £600k for the acquisition has been mentioned which brings the acquisition of BSG to over £1M and could be one of the reasons the NRA is in the red at the moment. Those are the rumours circulating at the moment producing the negative attitude towards the association.
- 5.20. CESD remarked that a lot of comments he has heard is the NRA is a bit secretive and does things behind closed doors and doesn't tell its members what it's doing. He understands there are a number of issues which are confidential and need to stay confidential until conclusion. It is well known within GC that Council hold a confidential session and an open session during its meetings, and GC only see the minutes of the open session. Would it be possible for Council to summarise in a non-confidential manner, some of the activity that Council is doing behind the scenes so that GC is aware of issues being dealt with and be able to filter out to the wider membership the fact that there are things being dealt with, without prejudice to the activity itself.
- 5.21. RK remarked that he believes there is a growing trend of negative sentiment towards the NRA. He doesn't use social media, but has heard reports about individual members and clubs being treated harshly, of the NRA turning to litigation rather than sensible discussion about important issues, and the NRA wasting large sums of money on legal fees. RK gave the examples of John Killian, former tenant of Clock Tower Lodge, Robin Pizer, Surrey Rifle Association, Artist Rifles Clubhouse, North London Rifle Club and BSG lease renewals.
- 5.22. JL strongly advised that the NRA should not fight fire with fire on Facebook as it is the world's biggest soap box. You can do ten things right and no one will talk about it, and you can do one thing wrong and that's all you will hear about. Has anyone reviewed the various websites for any substance in what they are saying and then thought to put it forward to a meeting to do something positive about them?
- 5.23. JM agreed that Facebook can be a dangerous platform and remarked that there needs to be a better mechanism for mixing with the NRA membership as a lot of members don't know who the GC members are, or who their Regional contact or Discipline contact is. Could consideration be given to producing a name badge for all GC members to wear when out on the various ranges so people can recognise them and speak to them.
- 5.24. The Meeting agreed that name badges would be useful. The NRA will circulate a request to all GC members.
- 5.25. SL remarked that the NRA does need to engage more with their membership and be more open. There will always be people on social media who will make comments, which can't be stopped, but if the NRA are seen as being proactive and engaging, it will make a huge difference.
- 5.26. Graham Burns (GB) remarked that the only person who cares about a comment on social media is the person who wrote it.
- 5.27. AM added that the GC Regional and Discipline members had been asked for a short paragraph to be included in the Winter Journal as part of a 'Meet the Reps' article, and take up of that request has been modest.
- 5.28. BR remarked that the NRA journal is not reaching all the various clubs and members and if this is the method for informing the members, there needs to be better method of circulation so it gets to all shooters.

- 5.29. JH confirmed that all published copies of the NRA journal are available in electronic format on the NRA website. He also remarked that he hasn't seen any request for discipline information for the Journal.
- 5.30. DCal remarked that he would not like to see the journal move from its current printed form to electronic format, and both formats should be retained. He also remarked that there was a period in the past when badges were presented to GC members and were worn on blazers at evening events during the Imperial Meeting. With regards to the confidential matters of Council meetings, he wasn't aware that there was a separate confidential meeting held, and would therefore encourage Council and the Trustees to publish an indication of items that are being discussed confidentially and add the reasons why they are confidential.
- 5.31. SL remarked that it is easy to put the NRA journal into an electronic format and then the link could be shared with the NRA membership and affiliated clubs.
- 5.32. CESD remarked that one issue is that members are not aware of how best to communicate with the NRA and rather than encourage everyone to email the Secretary General, we need to make people aware of the best routes into GC and Council through their discipline and regional representative and there should be better publicity for that. CESD remarked that areas covered by the Regional Reps are not very well known or understood and the regions should be published annually and include the counties they are responsible for, according to the Second Schedule. Better visibility of the reps and areas should be published for the members including anonymised emails addresses and photographs and a link distributed to the members for information of how to make contact.
- 5.33. AM confirmed that website does provide contact details for all the GC members and is very much looking forward to re-routing all the email traffic to the relevant reps and wanted to ensure that all reps are happy and prepared to receive those emails.
- 5.34. RK remarked that the regions coincide with the Sports Council regions but a better understanding of which counties belong to each region is needed.
- 5.35. CESD remarked that the Sports Council no longer exists and has been replaced by Sport England and their website is very unclear as to how the different regions are set out.
- 5.36. KR remarked that the Spring 2004 journal lists the different regions and counties and this is available on the NRA website. KR added that she is an admin of the UK Fullbore group and there are some helpful groups on social media who can explain things to people who do have any issues or problems. However there are other groups who will always have negative posts and there is nothing the NRA could do to convince them that it is a good organisation. So there is a question of targeted groups and whether the NRA should consider creating its own forum to have the right people answering the questions and quell the rumours.
- 5.37. The Chairman thanked KR for those thoughts and the idea that the NRA could draw on the skills of GC members to provide that kind of support would be very useful.
- 5.38. The Chairman reminded GC members to complete the Skills Audit Questionnaire if not already done so to help understand the range of skills available on GC.
- 5.39. CESD remarked that the Skills Audit doesn't request a list of professions or qualifications of GC members and could this be added to help enhance the information.
- 5.40. The Chairman stated that this discussion had been very helpful and was good preparation for the GC meeting in February where people will be able to formulate their thoughts on the contribution they could make.
- 5.41. ACT agreed and remarked he had found the discussion to be very interesting and helpful. He would like to mention that in order for GC members to be more helpful and assist effectively in fielding enquiries, it will require more sight and involvement in decisions that the NRA is making, otherwise GC members will only be able to act as a "middle-man".
- 5.42. The Chairman remarked that dealing with questions from the membership does involve a degree of work and it will be very useful to have members of GC sharing some of that burden.
- 5.43. BR proposed that in order to be more proactive with the regions and clubs, a noticeboard notice be produced and sent out to club secretaries for display in club houses and ranges with bullet points informing them what the NRA does for them.
- 5.44. The Chairman agreed that would be helpful and also assist in promoting the charity and its existence for the public good and the more that message can be communicated is positive for the NRA and its charitable purposes.

- 5.45. DC asked for confirmation that the BSG acquisition figures mentioned earlier were indeed correct. The Chairman responded that the acquisition of BSG was completed with a commercial confidentiality clause therefore he is unable to discuss the matter or comment on any of the figures quoted by DC. A paper with the terms of the acquisition were circulated to GC members at the previous meeting. DC remarked that this is the kind of thing which fuels rumour and speculation and creates mistrust.
- 5.46. ACT remarked that he agrees that confidentiality should be maintained under the terms agreed, but could the Council consider whether an appropriate statement be made to GC such as provide updates over the coming years as to how the BSG business is running and the extent to which it is returning surplus into the NRA at the levels expected as part of the cost modelling of the purchase of the business. More thought should be given to not focusing so much on the confidentiality and providing a more balanced message across to keep GC members informed.
- 5.47. AM remarked that the transaction information would be reported in the annual report and accounts and will give some indication to the influence of the finances of the NRA. AM added that since taking over BSG, the business has been doing well with gross receipts in October of over £100k. The business is currently exceeding expectations.
- 5.48. The Treasurer confirmed to the meeting that BSG transaction will be reported on as part of the report and accounts and the Trustees were cognisant in their obligations to make an efficient use of public funds and made the choice that they did based on all the information in front of them, knowing that they may have to justify those questions being raised to the likes of the regulator. He also added that when considering the role of GC, it might also be helpful in reaching out to the general membership to see what other volunteering possibilities that could be elicited from the membership as there is a resource constraint on the professional staff.

No further questions were raised.

The meeting closed at 11.20am



NRA Chairman