

## Open letter to Janet Mackenzie

On 1 July 2015, Janet Mackenzie, an Honorary Life Member of Editors Victoria, wrote an article entitled, *Revolution or Evolution: Thoughts on the Direct Membership Model*, in which she urged members to vote against the proposed transition to direct membership. This letter responds to Janet's comments from the point of view of the Transition Working Party.

Dear Janet

Thank you for taking the time to make your views on the forthcoming transition proposal known to Editors Victoria members. The Transition Working Party, of which I am the Project Manager, takes your comments seriously, as we realise that they reflect the views of many of the total membership. Indeed, we give and will continue to give careful consideration to all members' views and all current societies' views and to maintain a careful consultation process throughout, for as long as it takes.

I circulated your letter to all members of this working party and the IPEd Council, and, as a result, the working party (WP4) held a special meeting to discuss the issues you raise.

While we have been receiving feedback on the green papers from individual members, we have also been analysing the tasks and effort needed to set up the new version of IPEd, with its new systems, staff and procedures. That analysis has convinced us that a more gradual approach to the transition than was initially envisaged will be more practical. Details of that approach are given below.

You mention that 'When IPEd was formed, assurances were given that the national organisation would not attempt any kind of takeover of the state and Canberra societies'. I think it is fair to say that IPEd has respected those assurances, but that project teams in all societies have worked towards implementing national approaches in some areas already. This is no better illustrated than by the success of the national programs that IPEd has gradually been asked to manage, including accreditation, the *Australian Standards for Editing Practice* and, most recently, the National Mentoring Program.

Programs and projects that surveys show to be important for editors, such as advocacy and equity in professional development opportunities, cannot be achieved successfully by seven small groups, but a single national entity could and would develop such initiatives under a direct membership model. Take for example the current *Style Manual* interest group. Any influence that editors as a profession are able to have on future government decisions regarding this can only be achieved by IPEd as a whole. IPEd as it is, however much money it has, cannot have the same impact that a focused national organisation of individual editors can have.

You also express your doubts about whether the bigger and wealthier societies such as Editors Victoria will have much to gain from a national model. As an Honorary Life Member of Editors Victoria, I too have a sentimental attachment to it, but I do not agree that by insisting on keeping to ourselves our assets and advantages while smaller societies struggle along, we are embodying the spirit in which those assets were gathered. Also, many members believe that in the rapidly changing environment in which editors work, a strong national voice is essential. With the small amount of money levied on the societies for IPEd, I believe it has proven to be a prudent and conscientious guardian of funds. Those accumulated funds do not belong to individuals. Wishing to cling to what each society already has would not be in the spirit of benefiting individuals above their societies, the premise on which nationalisation is built.

Janet, you mention several risks to the future of IPEd in the DMM, so let's look at these one by one:

**1. Death spiral.** We in WP4 acknowledge that a large increase in fees will cause some members to rethink renewing their subscriptions. Others have also expressed this view. The more gradual transition now envisaged will require a less onerous fee structure (see WP4's modified proposed strategy below). In Queensland recently a large increase (from \$85 to \$150 for full members; \$65 to \$90 for associates) actually resulted in an increase in membership, as a new President and committee demonstrated the benefits that would accrue to members for their continued membership. Just a few years ago, this society was in serious danger of disappearing, but an energetic and focused committee was able to turn that around in a short time.

See the bullet list later for details of the proposed variation to the fee structure.

**2. Lack of unanimity.** In any vote of this type there is always a risk of dissatisfaction from those whose vote does not align with the majority decision, but our first consideration is for individual editors, not the societies themselves. One scenario would be that the status quo is maintained and societies who voted against the change would go their own way with their members choosing individually whether to join the new IPEd, stay with their own society or indeed join both.

**3. Burden on volunteers.** It is simply not true that there will be an increased burden on existing volunteers, especially in light of the more gradual transition being considered at this point. Any change will generate new and different work during the transition, but a single national membership structure and financial arrangements, once established, will relieve a huge amount of the burden from society volunteers at present struggling with these tasks.

**4. Disconnection.** At no time has IPEd proposed any diminution of the importance of the local activities that society members enjoy and rely on. Related to the previous point, once local volunteers are able to be freed from the administrative burden of membership and financial portfolios, they will be able to use their available time more creatively to ensure an even wider range of relevant local activities.

Based on feedback from all members and our analysis of the work involved in the transition, WP4 has now agreed to propose the following strategic plan:

- Take a much more gradual, staged approach to the transition to DMM, with the initial stage including the essential elements – that is, those elements without which the later stages can't happen. Most importantly, this stage would implement a centralised membership system using MEMNET.

That will enable:

- a single membership structure
  - event management and registration
  - a national freelance register
  - the membership list and functions enabling national and branch newsletters
  - efficient access to members-only information
  - the basis for settling up and handling of finances.
- Engage contract staffing for the first stage, sufficient to manage the membership and event system, to handle all accounting and banking, and essential executive officer duties, to focus on management of the first-stage functions, planning for further stages, and individual advocacy and representation of the new, direct membership organisation.

- Implement, as a consequence, only a modest fee increase at the outset – only enough to cover the essential elements. (This may be as low as \$150 for full membership in the first stage instead of the \$280 originally envisaged.)
- Include in the information package that will accompany voting documentation an outline of each of the other aspects of a **total** DMM transition, but as aspirational future services only, based on the work already undertaken by WP4 – such items as a national newsletter and a national website, plus the beginnings of readily accessible professional development training and other benefits to individual members of a national organisation. Implementation of these additional shared services and any necessary fee increases will be the business of the new IPEd and subject to approval by the individual members as required by the new constitution.
- Consider the needs of and benefits to individual editor members ahead of those of the current societies or later branches, as individual editors will become the direct members of IPEd, and to give an immediate national voice to Australian editors in a profession where national organisations are the norm internationally.
- Address one aspect of a concern expressed by some about ‘loss of identity’ by making it possible for the branches that succeed the current societies to retain the names of their ‘parent’ society – if they wish.

Janet, thank you for raising these issues when you did. They have helped WP4 in the consideration of a practical and effective transition of IPEd to a national direct membership association.

I hope you agree that these points help to address your concerns about rushing and trying to include too much in one hit. I urge you and all our members to consider these points and familiarise yourselves with the white papers and information pack when that arrives in your mailboxes in the next couple of months. Most of all, I urge you all, when the time comes, to vote because you are fully informed and encourage your fellow editors to vote to make the final decision one that reflects a true majority.

Rosemary Noble AE  
 Project Manager, IPEd Transition Project  
 19 July 2015