



GAELIC FOOTBALL & HURLING ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALASIA INC.

SECRETARY'S REPORT TO 2021 AUSTRALASIAN CONVENTION

As I write this report I look back on the same time last year when I was at Congresses in Dublin and Galway as well as numerous other venues for meetings in Ireland with GAA/LGFA/Camogie officials. At that time there was talk of Covid but most thought it was a problem in China only and would have little effect elsewhere. Indeed, there was much emotion at the LGFA Congress conclusion when Antrim were awarded the right to host the 2021 Congress. My parting words then were "see you in my home county in March 2021". Fast forward 12 months and we see all Congresses in Ireland will be through virtual platforms.

Last year my annual report started on a very positive note referring to the World Games but this year it's so different. I won't use the oft mentioned words of unprecedented etc. etc. as we all have heard those over and over. What I would say is just about all affiliates met the challenge head-on which resulted in games being played at one time or another throughout 2020. I was in a position at the outset to liaise with SportAus on Return to Play Plans and forwarded a draft to all affiliates as a basis to arrive at a local Plan for recommencing training and play. The committees in W Australia and NSW particularly in the early stages formulated excellent Plans that took into account their State local Health advice. At that time, I was asked and forwarded on these plans to the GAA in Ireland as we were recognised as leaders in this area. Other Australasian States quickly followed in relation to training and ultimately games which saw finals being played throughout Australasia. To those on the various State committees who worked diligently to achieve this, thank you.

Forward to today and Wellington and Christchurch are well underway with social and formal games, Adelaide is preparing for grand finals, Melbourne has had the Garryowen and Pearses tournaments and league starting at their new venue, Sydney has commenced its season in all codes, Hobart has held social games, Perth's season fixtures are currently being arranged and hopefully after the AGM in Brisbane the same will happen there. So all in all despite a reduction in playing numbers, Gaelic Games are again to the fore in Australasia.

Coaching on School Curriculums

One side benefit of Covid-19 is that it has allowed me and Australasia to concentrate on some major initiatives. The first is what I reported on last year viz. implementation of Gaelic Football in school curriculum. Glenn Carpenter and I have spent considerable time on this to the point whereby we have now forwarded to teaching conference groups such as ACHPER to let them know what we are doing as a proposal to integrate Gaelic football into the curriculum for years 9 & 10 Australia and Level 5 in New Zealand. This would in the first stage target the 14 – 15-year-old age group as a prelude to going forward with 16 to 17 y.o. These 14 to 17 y.o. are the ones that come through academies/underage training and then don't have a pathway to senior grade in most affiliates.

We have a provisional invite to the following so far from:

Northern Territory - August 28th

Queensland - August 12th & 13th (HPE Teachers)

(Maybe) Queensland - April 15th & 16th (Recreation Teachers)

As well as this, in New Zealand we have been invited to make a submission to attend their conference in July 2021 which we have done and are awaiting their reply. Hopefully by Convention we will have had responses from WA, SA, Victoria and NSW education departments.

Recently I forwarded a copy of the Plan to Leinster Council and to say they were excited about it would be an understatement. They have offered, and we gladly accepted the services of Leinster Council's designer to assist with the formulation of the final booklet. Once we start the teachers/schools will be given this 108-page booklet rather than electronic copies to ensure we retain ownership of the contents and they are not altered as could be the case.

Upon going through the course content we have been asked by Leinster Council if we would provide it to the European Board as they are seeking to do the same as what we have proposed.

A copy of the Intermediate Unit Plan will be provided prior to Convention to States so that there is an understanding of the presentation Glenn and I will be coordinating at Convention in Sydney to further explain where we are and where we want to be. This will provide an opportunity for delegates to ask questions on this important project.

Foundation Coaching Course

After a number of courses in 2019 we were restricted from presenting in most affiliates in 2020 onwards. Two were held and as was the case previously were very well received. Victoria and New South Wales had dates pencilled in but we had to cancel them at the last minute and are in the throes of rescheduling. Those States with ongoing underage development should look at having a stand-alone course for those involved in coaching and assisting in coaching children. It is important that we get the course up and running in each affiliate not only to improve coaching levels but also as the person identified in each State to be the focal point of working with teachers in relation to the school curriculum, must have attended the Foundation Course.

As has been the case in the past the GFHAA continues to heavily subsidise costs of the course.

Club/State Association Training Courses

2020 has also provided the time to complete the development of training modules for Clubs and State Committees. The courses consist of the following modules:

1. Club Development
2. Pre AGM
3. Role of the President
4. Role of the Secretary
5. Role of the Treasurer
6. Role of the PRO

It has been obvious for some time that Clubs throughout Australasia have needed a training package. The majority have people in Executive positions who have no real idea of what their duties or responsibilities are and have never had these explained to them. What I have tried to do is make the modules as expansive as possible thus allowing each State Committee to have them available to present to their Clubs. Some States/Clubs will want to cover "everything" in the modules whilst others maybe do not see a need to utilize all the content.

I believe the training could be done over various evenings or days with e.g. separate sessions for Club Presidents/Secretaries/Treasurers/PRO's. It is intended that affiliates rather than Australasia will deliver the training unless States seek assistance from the GFHAA, which will be readily provided.

It isn't just Clubs that need training but State committees as well, as I am aware that many people also haven't much idea of their roles. The contents quite easily could be used as training for State AGM's, State Development and for those in State Executive committee positions.

The modules will be sent prior to 27 March for all to peruse and then we will be in a position to discuss at Convention.

Underage Development

As with other Gaelic Games, underage development had to take a back seat however things are very much ramping up again especially in Wellington (and Kapiti), Melbourne and Geelong where their work with children is second to none. Perth has now taken the initiative I believe to “join” their underage and minor boards to have a better pathway to older levels. We have been more than happy to help all our affiliates involved in underage development with a supply of various types of equipment and will continue to do so where appropriate.

There is a proposal (presently on hold) to have a Feile competition in Australasia which has received support from some States and I look forward to further discussion on this at Convention.

Strategic Planning

Following on from the 2020 Convention there was final approval of the new Australasian Strategic Plan which focuses on the following core areas that will assist States, namely:

- Marketing & Sponsorship
- Membership
- Development - Promotional, Facilities, Competitions, Grants, Coaching,
- Operations
- Officiating

Unfortunately, Covid-19 has resulted in very little progression of this at most levels and it will now be a case of starting over again with the same Plan for 2021 - 2024

Refereeing

Refereeing Courses were held during the last year in Adelaide, Melbourne, Geelong, Sydney, Wellington and Christchurch with Perth pencilled in for March. A new “forum” format for camogie was introduced at the course in Sydney which received positive feedback. 20+ people both male and female attended the football course in Melbourne and I would have to say the positivity and interaction displayed by everyone led to it being the best course I have presented in over 20 years. Geelong also saw four prospective male and female referees under 17 attending some of whom have since refereed in Geelong. In 2021 I will be working on producing a separate course for women’s football referees.

I have to repeat that until a unit has in place the right people as referee coordinators to mentor and assess referees each week then the standards a State requires will not be achieved. Having coordinators who also play/manage/coach/referee themselves means that they are not in a position to watch all games as required. Also having one coordinator responsible for more than one code especially if they have other responsibilities can lead to the same outcome.

The GFHAA can do no more than present courses and provide all the tools necessary to have competent referees but without the right coordinators in place, units will not achieve the outcome they desire. Having locals in place to present referee courses has been brought up by a couple of people. Our response is that if we were satisfied that these people had an extensive knowledge of refereeing requirements, were able to answer/clarify queries and interpretations raised throughout the course immediately, then we would be happy to discuss this further. It would seem however that more energy should be put into getting in place as stated above, competent referee coordinators rather than an issue of the GFHAA presenting. We will continue to heavily subsidise the cost of referee courses.

As I went around units it was disappointing to see that the new booklet that was produced in 2019 that relates solely to women's football rules had not been distributed as much as we had hoped for. As previously stated, the booklets are designed to be an aid in understanding rules **for new players, not so new players as well as referees.**

4.

Great to see that NSW have now introduced a fluoro referee top for new referees. S Australia also have done this previously and the tops are designed to make players aware that those wearing it are “new and in training”. Also after a downturn in recent years there has lately been an increase in States purchasing new referee strips from the GFHAA. Referees being correctly attired makes the right impression on those watching games.

A new initiative in place is that all our refereeing needs in regards to score books, black books with red and yellow cards and certificates etc. are all being printed locally with our logo on-board thereby negating the need to have them sent out from Ireland. As well, the Team Sheet books have been modified and also are printed locally. All of these continue to be supplied to States at no cost to them.

GAA/DFA Funding

Thanks to GAA/DFA funding from Ireland, six projects in W Australia, Queensland, and Victoria were completed in 2020 to the tune of AUD\$34 000. (A number of other applications were withdrawn as they could not be completed because of Covid in 2020).

As a result of numerous projects worldwide not being started, the Chair of the World GAA committee Niall Erskine discussed at great length with the DFA and Finance section in Croke the option of the unused 2020 funds being made available. He is a very persuasive man and the GAA and DFA agreed to make a further €130 000 available for international Clubs that had been impacted financially as a result of Covid. The successful units for this funding in Australasia were some of those who returned a survey I sent out some months ago asking for details of how they had expended more of their money than what they received in income. A total of \$42 500 was disbursed to eight Australasian units. For **2021**, there have been a record 17 GAADFA applications from Australasian units.

Anti-Doping & Sport Integrity Australia

Over the last 12 months I have had numerous team meetings, correspondence, drafts of new Policies etc. with officers from Sport Integrity Australia. This led to us issuing I August 2020 the new GFHAA Anti-Doping Policy. Ongoing work over many months with Sport Integrity Australia staff has culminated in a new joint document that I recently issued to affiliates entitled “**GFHAA Education Plan**” that covers the issues of Anti-Doping and other required related integrity issue e.g. match fixing. This will be discussed further at the Australasian Convention.

Insurance.

The cover for affiliates in relation to insurance exposure for members of State and Australasian committees has been renewed and funded by Australasia.

Public Relations Officer

Our PRO Alan Whykes unfortunately in 2020 had numerous issues to confront not least of all a number of breaks to his leg/s which has prevented him carrying out a lot of tasks he had scheduled. His report will be discussed at Convention.

World GAA

The President will at Convention give a report on what has taken place during his World GAA meetings in the last year. The Congress in Ireland saw Niall Erskine’s three-year term as Chairman come to an end. Niall was very instrumental in getting general purpose funding in the last two years for all international units, something which never happened before. I also was heavily involved in a World GAA subcommittee charged with developing a World GAA constitution. This was a project led by Niall and as a result the aims and ethos of the constitution will be written into the GAA Official Guide. Six motions in relation to World GAA were on the agenda at the recent GAA Congress and all were passed unanimously with a further four to be discussed at a Special Congress. The Australasian association were indeed very well served by Niall during the times of change in Victoria. His enthusiasm, counsel and help with all thing international will be missed as will the help, assistance and guidance from the departed Uachtaran John Horan.

Registrations, Transfers & Sanctions

Playing numbers dropped, not unexpectedly to their lowest number in 10 years (see below) which is concerning and perhaps shows how **some** affiliates are reliant on players from Ireland. All Australian States availed of the Online Player Registration system through Active Network. The LGFA are looking at a proposal we put to them to also use the GAA Online Player Transfer system. From February 2021 the Camogie association now requires transfers for players to/from Australasia

Women's International Transfers:

Interstate Transfers Male & Female

Unit	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016
WA	32	29	25	18	37	12	1	3	5	3
SA	0	3	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	2
VIC	43	84	43	46	10	2	6	3	2	11
NSW	87	66	61	77	59	1	6	7	18	18
Q'LAND	9	8	15	14	10	1	1	5	0	8
TAS	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
W'TON	11	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	
C'BURY	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
TOTAL	182	190	144	145	117	17	16	18	26	42

Registrations to OCT 2020

UNIT	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010
WA	453	490	517	545	525	646	960	1084	949	769	568
SA	192	301	263	302	371	363	453	411	408	549	350
VIC	405	841	666	466	418	477	437	493	443	436	353
NSW	1055	1049	1068	1082	965	773	765	769	843	622	615
QLD	278	363	353	449	437	430	606	440	458	384	440
TAS	34	0	0	0	53	53	78	59	69	111	50
HVW	90	63	62	0	129	129	122	97	106	112	93
C'BRY	110	53	52	0	106	106					
TOTAL	2617	3160	2981	2844	3036	2977	3421	3353	3276	2983	2469

Farewell

Convention 2021 will officially see the retirement of treasurer Paddy Hegarty. I don't believe there has been or ever will be another person worldwide to hold an executive position on a GAA board for 45 years as Paddy has done. In his role as treasurer he performed his duties impeccably as the guardian of association monies and whilst he didn't like the "new-fangled ways" of recording details his record keeping was second to none.

There is no one from outside the Australasian association including GAA/LGFA/Camogie Presidents who didn't love **socialising** with Paddy. Indeed, each year I attended Congresses etc. I can genuinely say that everyone who spoke about Australasia always asked, "how's Paddy going and what has he been up to lately!"

So many of his friends within the Australasian community can attest to having numerous enjoyable times with him and none more so that the Australasian President Ned Sheehy and previously but in a different way, past President Seamus Sullivan!

Whilst Paddy was the life and soul of events there was a very serious side that only some saw. He was a fierce defender of the Australasian associations. He was always able to differentiate between what may have been good for one or two units against what was best for all affiliates. I and the GFHAA always could rely on his support especially in difficult times whenever we were mostly without any foundation being criticised.

All of us have favourite tales with Paddy and whilst we won't have him at Convention in Sydney I am hoping that we can arrange something in Melbourne where he can attend and be suitably farewelled and roasted!

To Anne, his wife of many years we say thanks for allowing us to have him at all the events over the years as well as his daily life as treasurer. After all this time it is great to see that he now is giving back to you all the support that you gave to him.

I have known Paddy for all of the 45 years he has been treasurer and can say I counted him not just as a member of the Board but as a very close and personal friend.

General

My thanks to the members of Australasian Council for your work in carrying out your duties trying to spread the message of what the GFHAA is about even when there were many negatives around. It was and is very much appreciated.

To the President Ned Sheehy, also many thanks for the manner in which you carried out your role. Your support for what we have been trying to do to assist Units is unwavering. It certainly has been challenging in many ways and not just because of Covid.

As I listened to new President of the GAA Larry McCarthy at 3am on 27 February in his inauguration speech at Congress his following comments could have summed up what has been occurring here in certain areas both on and off field in the last year or more and not just on social media:

“One of the lessons that we might learn from the recent near collapse of democracy in the United States is that words matter. What one says matters, what one puts in the public domain matters. In that regard I would ask all of us to tone down the tenor of our public commentary. Social media has wonderful aspects to it, but there is also a dark side. One of which is, in the words of sports commentator Bob Costas, “a corrosive assault on civility”. Let’s think about that, “a corrosive assault on civility”.

By all means let us express an opinion, but please let’s do it in a manner that is respectful. There is no place for the type of abuse that many of our players, volunteers and officials have been subjected to in recent years.

By all means argue the point in a public discussion, but do so in a manner which does justice not only to yourself but to the GAA. If you are one of those keyboard warriors who, in cowardly fashion hides behind nom de plume’s and aliases, and castigates our officials, players or referees, stop.

Your behaviour not only has a corrosive effect on civility, it has a long term corrosive effect on the GAA as it discourages people from volunteering as members of our Association.

I would also ask the members of the Critics Collective to realise that their comments reverberate around the echo chamber of social media.”

The GFHAA and State committees will at all times be happy to enter into dialogue with any Club/member in a respectful way and would seek to have this reciprocated. It really is time that personalities were taken out of the equation and whilst there will always be differences of opinions, we all can work together for the greater good of Gaelic Games.

The upcoming Convention will be shorter than normal and similarly I have kept this report to key points and look forward to discussion on it on 27 March.

Gerard

GERARD ROE
SECRETARY