

*Normally this report would be delivered at the NZMA AGM that is held at our Track & Field Championships. Given that has not happened yet, it is being published in Vetline and posted on our website.*

*Our aim is to hold a SPECIAL GENERAL MEETING via ZOOM before the end of May. While this is not technically within our Constitution, I am sure that most members will agree that given the current circumstances, this is a better option than having no contact at all*

### **The Effects of Covid 19:**

Covid 19 continues to have an effect here in New Zealand and the rest of world, making for another challenging year. We have seen numerous events modified to fit within Covid 19 Levels restrictions, postponed or cancelled. What is clear, it that life as we knew it has changed for the foreseeable future.

We will look back to late February 2021, we were fortunate to get through the 2021 championships held in Inglewood from February 25<sup>th</sup> – 27<sup>th</sup> 2021. Following a community outbreak in Auckland that weekend, a Level 2 lockdown was imposed at mid-night on the Saturday night. Following discussions with various people, we decided to complete our Championships. I would like to acknowledge the hours of work that the LOC were required to do prior to Sunday's events, to create a plan to ensure groups of 100 were created / separated, to ensure we met the Level 2 restrictions. It was a calculated risk to continue. Some members decided not to attend on the Sunday, but the feedback from those who stayed was positive. More importantly, no-one at the event had, nor caught Covid 19 because we choose to continue with Sunday's competition.

That brings me to the 2022 NZMA Championships that were to be held Wellington, March 11<sup>th</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup> 2022. Four weeks prior to this event, the Omicron Covid 19 community outbreak resulted in gathering restrictions for outside events being reduced to 100 per group, with strict guidelines about not mixing groups within an event. This restriction of no mixing groups was the biggest challenge, given our members do multiple events. Whether we thought the restrictions were appropriate or not, they were the guidelines we were required to follow.

During this time, I remember watching two of Athletics NZ Classic meetings on SkySport Next. Even with the help from Athletics NZ staff, involving numerous officials and employed security guards, they appeared to struggle running these events within the gathering guidelines of keeping 'groups' apart.

New Zealand Masters Athletics is run by volunteers. We do our best to organise events on your behalf, however there is limit to what we can achieve. The decision to postpone the 2022 NZMA Championships was not taken lightly. I acknowledge that this did not please everyone, but the overwhelming feedback I received was supportive of the decision.

The advice at the time was that the Omicron was a very contagious strain. It was predicted to spread rapidly throughout the country. The outbreak was expected to peak at about the time we would have been holding our championships. The Wellington Masters Centre were not prepared to host an event, given the uncertainty about the level of infections with could expect within the community. The NZMA Board shared their concerns. Both groups did not want to organise an event that could potentially become a 'super spreader event'. Afterall, we are an aging population and are potentially at greater risk, should any one of us catch Covid 19. I appreciate that other big events were still held, such as the Athletics NZ Championships a week earlier. I do know that following this event, several athletes / officials did go down with Covid 19.

At the time I am writing this report, the NZMA Board is looking into what options we have regarding when and where we host the next New Zealand Masters Track & Field Championships. No decision is straight forward. Our event needs to fit in with other major events throughout the season, and until those dates are known, it is impossible for us to set our date. Most local Masters' Centres cannot host our championships without the help

from the Athletics NZ Centre. Until we have confirmation about the venue and dates for the next Athletics NZ Championships, our decisions are in limbo.

***Looking back Winter 2021 Events:***

During the winter season, most cross-country events were able to occur with no restrictions. However, this changed once a Covid 19 community case occurred in Auckland in early August. The whole country was then required to go into a Level 4 lockdown for four weeks, resulting in most events during this time being cancelled. Once most of the country, apart from the Auckland region, moved to Level 3, then to Level 2, various events were able to be held, albeit with some restrictions. It required significant effort and detailed health & safety plans for race organisers, to ensure these events could be held safely and successfully.

Unfortunately, it did mean that some Athletics NZ Championships events were cancelled. The National Road Championships were first postponed from late September to early November, but then cancelled as the restrictions in Auckland remained in place. The National Road Relay Championships to be held in early October, were down-graded to a local event. For many of our distance athletes, the Road Relay event is very popular and key focus for the season, so while that was understandable, it was disappointing.

Given Auckland was in lockdown, NZMA were forced to cancel our indoor championships for the second year in a row. Similarly, the North Island Masters Track & Field Championships (Auckland) were also cancelled. Under Level 2 restrictions the South Island event held in Dunedin was able to go ahead. The numbers attending was similar to previous years.

***Athletics NZ & NZMA registrations:***

The NZMA registration year starts as from 1<sup>st</sup> September. Given Covid 19 has been around for almost two years, it is not surprising that we have seen fewer NZMA members rejoin. There are fewer than 140 NZMA non-club members across all Centres, who mainly compete in track & field. There are approximately a further 1500 masters registered with clubs, who have the option to compete all year round, i.e. in non-stadia events.

The uncertainty, plus the inability or unwillingness to travel is certainly having an impact on registration / participation numbers. At a local level here in Canterbury, I have noticed that there are fewer masters attending our track & field meetings compared with previous years. I am not sure if numbers will increase again, once Covid 19 is 'under control'. Having experienced lockdown and having a forced break from training, for some it may be very hard to regain the desire and motivation to regain lost fitness, compounded by the fact we are all getting older.

***Memorandum of Understanding between Athletics New Zealand and New Zealand Masters Athletics:***

The concept of creating this MOU has overall been successful, in terms of encouraging masters to attend our track & field championship events. I have no doubt that it has helped us retain attendance figures up over 200. I acknowledge that with fewer local masters / NZMA members it is a challenge to run masters only events within a region and to get personnel to step up to help run a Masters' only committee. However, for the good of the sport going forwards, working with Athletics NZ has its benefits. For most Centres throughout New Zealand, both groups work well together.

Below is the breakdown between Athletics NZ and NZMA attendance figures at NZMA Track & Field Championships. It has to be remembered that in past years, numerous Athletics NZ masters knew nothing about what we offered, other than the non-stadia events organised by Athletics NZ.

The benefit of the MOU is that the barrier between the two groups has been removed. Athletics NZ now regularly promote our events on their website calendar.

Inglewood (2021)	223	164 ANZ Club members & 59 NZMA members (26%)
Hastings (2020):	201	124 ANZ Club members, 44 NZMA members (22%) & 4 overseas
Timaru (2019)	192	114 ANZ Club members, 73 NZMA members (38%) & 5 overseas

Whangarei (2018)	227	132 ANZ Club members, 88 NZMA members (39%) & 7 overseas
Nelson (2017)	221	no break down figures available

### ***NZMA Membership Numbers – Vetline has gone digital:***

As has been stated before, the NZMA (non-club) membership numbers continues to drop. As part of their subscription, all NZMA members have previously received four copies the Vetline magazine per year.

As from January 2022 Vetline went digital. It is now available to all Masters via the NZMA website as a free PDF. If you would like to read the back story of how the NZMA Board came to this decision, that also can be found on the Vetline website page.

The debate going forward is what should the NZMA registration fees now be? This is something to be discussed at the SGM.

### ***Oceania Masters Council (OMA) update:***

The OMA 2021 Championships to be held in Norfolk Island were cancelled, due to the uncertainty of travel between countries. The OMA AGM was held on 20<sup>th</sup> January 2022, with an almost complete change of council members. Stewart Foster was re-elected as treasurer and Joan Merrilees on the committee. What has become apparent is that Oceania Athletics (OAA) is going to take a greater role in organising OMA events going forward, almost making the OMA Council redundant. That makes perfect sense for event held in the Islands, given OAA have those connection already established. OMA events held in Australia or New Zealand can usually be organised successfully locally, but it does require the assistance of the local Athletics NZ Centre.

The 2023 OMA Championships are due to be held in New Zealand. We are currently looking for a Centre to host this event. If your Centre interested, please contact me ASAP. I suspect the event is most likely to be held during October 2023.

### ***NZMA Board Update and SPECIAL GENERAL MEETING date to be set:***

During the past year all Board meetings have been held via Zoom, resulting in more meetings as and when required. I apologise for not sending out the minutes of these meetings and I will upload all minutes to our website.

As mentioned before the NZMA Board is a small group of dedicated volunteers. There are challenges that this organisation faces. Below is a list of issues that need addressing, but there may be more. I simply don't have the answers, and I am seeking ideas from YOU. Within the next two months, the NZMA Board will advise members re: SPECIAL GENERAL MEETING date. At this meeting, you will all have an opportunity to discuss any of the issues listed below:

1. **Succession Planning** – It is impossible to create a succession plan without more people stepping up to help, prior to the established members stepping down from the role. I am concerned that the turnover of Board members is not happening. This is not meant to be a 'job for life'. How do we encourage more members to become involved with admin roles?
2. **The future of NZMA** – Currently, the only focus that NZMA has is assisting Masters Centres to organise out three track & field championships, plus with the administration of confirming athletes attending overseas events are members of NZMA (or an Athletics NZ club). What should be our role? Now the Vetline has gone digital, what should the NZMA registration fees be? What do NZMA need the funds for?
3. **The future of Masters' Centres** – Have they had their day? Is it time the all Masters' Centres to simply become an operational committee of the local Athletics NZ Centre. This is currently how it works in Canterbury.
4. **Greater inter-Centre Interaction** – Since Covid 19 has been around, Athletic NZ introduced monthly Centre Zoom meetings as a way of communicating information and seeking feedback for around the

country. I would like to introduce these for Masters' Centres too. Do you agree with this initiative?

5. **Greater assistance from Athletics NZ** – Athletics NZ have paid staff dedicated to organizing events. Is it time for Athletics NZ to have a greater involvement in assisting NZMA to organise our three track & field championships? Do Athletics NZ take over that role completely?

The above list is not necessarily complete. If you have other items you would like us to consider, please send me an e-mail (Andrew Stark – [aws@xtra.co.nz](mailto:aws@xtra.co.nz))

*Andrew Stark*