

Past two years!

I think we can all agree that the past two years have been challenging! With Covid 19 restricting our movements and causing events to be cancelled, often at short notice, it has been hard to settle into a 'normal' life routine. Given there is a new wave of Covid cases within the community, life is still anything but normal.

With modern communications now available to just about everyone, my preferred method of getting information out to our members is either by bulk e-mail or creating a website page of information and then e-mailing a page link to members. The old method via an e-mail to Centre Secretaries did not always mean information was passed on to everyone.

We have a database of 650 people, created by collecting information from those who have attended NZMA events in the past few years (NZMA and Athletics NZ masters). While this does not include all masters within clubs, it does include those who have had an interest in track and field events. This is the group who receive information via e-mail.

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

In my last report I presented the findings of the surveys sent out prior to the May 2022 AGM and the results were discussed at the time. It was clear that a majority of members agree that NZMA should have a closer relationship with Athletics NZ. I have already had discussions with Pete Pfitzinger (CEO), Hamish Meacham (Community Manager) and Jason Cameron (Competitions Manager) about how that might look. Later in this report I intend to outline what the way forward might look like, and these points will form the basis of a discussion whereby you all have an opportunity to have your say. I will also conduct a short survey to all members prior to the AGM, the results of which will be published on the website and will form part of the discussion at the AGM.

Athletics NZ & NZMA registrations

The NZMA registration year started as from 1st September. In September, Athletics NZ introduced a new database system and those involved in clubs will know that the process was challenging. As yet I have not had the time to understand how we setup the NZMA portal to handle non-club registrations online. If you joined online last season, it would be easier if you joined via your Masters' Centre for now.

Given Covid 19 has been around for two years, it is not surprising that we have seen fewer NZMA members rejoin. There are fewer than 50 NZMA non-club members currently across the Centres who have provided us with their database. I don't know the exact number of club masters' athletes, but if local registration numbers indicate what is happening nationally, they are possibly also trending down.

Entries for the NZMA Championships closed on 18th November, with 212 entries. A little bit down, but given the time of the year, I am happy with that. It is a huge job hosting this event and I thank Wellington Masters Athletics and Athletics Wellington in advance for hosting what I know will be a great event.

These are figures from recent championships:

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

Oceania Masters Athletics update

The 2023 Oceania Masters Athletics (OMA) Championships were due to be held in New Zealand. However, getting a Centre to host this event has proven impossible. The OMA Council has met with Oceania Area Athletics (OAA) and the current plan is to hold the 2023 event in Saipan, Northern Marianas from 22nd – 26th June 2023. I understand the master's events will be held on only three of the five days. It will be part of the Micronesian Championships.

This decision was a recommendation from OAA and at no time were NZMA nor Australian Masters Athletics consulted. While in principle I agree with a combined event, I believe the success of this event relies on Australia and New Zealand providing the bulk of the attendees. The challenge we all face is how do you get there? A quick search of routes and airfares would indicate that it is going to be very expensive, at least \$4.5k return. If that is the case and only a few go, it will detract from the status of the event.

Since this announcement I have spoken with John Clark (President, Australian Masters Athletics) on several topics, including about how we can work together more to ensure the viability of masters events. He has an AMA Board meeting in early December where he will bring up some of the points we discussed.

World Championships – Tampere, Finland

A very small team of seven made the trip north. In total they won 7 gold, 5 silver and 1 bronze medal and broke 3 New Zealand records, with one being a World Record – Jacqueline Wilson's 20k Road Walk in 2:25.37, just over 5 minutes better than the previous record. All results can be found in the PDF version of the July *Vetline*. I would like to thank Noni Callander for being the NZ Team Manager, ably assisted by Jim Blair when he was not competing or in hospital.

NZMA Board

For the past two years, all our Board meetings have been held via Zoom, which has not only been more time efficient for members, but has also significantly reduced the running costs of the organization.

Michael Wray joined the Board 2016. He has been responsible for updating records, creating Facebook posts, selling uniforms, setting up online entries, contributing reports for *Vetline*, coordinating the Athlete of Year Awards, including presenting the awards at our Annual Dinner, plus more that I have missed out. I have always been impressed with his willingness to contribute and his attention to detail. However, I suspect that comes with a lot of internal, self-created pressure as these are all time-consuming tasks, which he has done on top of very heavy 'real' workload, particularly in the past two years. This has taken its toll. Understandably Michael needs a break, so he is stepping down from the Board which leaves a huge gap to fill.

Ian Carter joined the Board in 2017. He has been a quiet contributor, drawing upon his many years of experience in the sport to offer sage advice. While he may not have the 'modern' day computer skills of us 'young' ones, he has made a valuable contribution and I appreciated his support. With his recent move up north and other commitments, he is seeking to step down from the Board but is prepared to serve for another year.

Brayden Grant was invited to become a Board member. All set to be elected in March 2022, his status was confirmed at the May 2022 AGM. Over the next few months, we will be upskilling Brayden to take over some of the tasks done by Michael.

Derek Shaw joined the Board in 2014. He has been responsible for creating the Board meeting minutes, chasing up and editing material for *Vetline* as well contributing reports, and overseeing the Constitution changes we have implemented. Being of similar age, he has been my 'go to' man when needing advice. He is also very much involved in other volunteer organizations within the Tasman region, but like myself, probably desires a break!!

Throughout the year, I have had conversations with Stewart Foster (ex NZMA Secretary / Treasurer), who keeps me up to date about what's going on and I look to him for some 'fatherly' advice from time to time with issues that arise. I also appreciate the advice and support I have received from our patron, Jim Blair.

With only a small group of official NZMA Board members, we have utilized the expertise of Anna Lynch (Accountant) to prepare our accounts using Xero software. You will notice the new modern look. I am keen to have her join the Board, but with two children under ten, her life is pretty busy.

I would also like to acknowledge **John Campbell** who continues to do the professional layout of *Vetline*.

The way forward for NZMA

As mentioned before, it is becoming increasingly more difficult to attract members and therefore effectively run NZMA. For some reason, many of the master's members within Clubs seem to think that getting involved with NZMA is not what you do. We are all part of the same group of masters. We simply have two different ways to join, as identified in our Constitution.

Following on from our Special AGM, these are the points I would like all members to reflect on and give us your views.

1. **Athletics NZ Role:** If Athletics NZ becomes more involved, they can use their paid staff to call for and allocate where the NZMA Track & Field Championships would be held each year. Athletics NZ would create an MOU with the hosting Centre. The MoU would include deciding on a suitable profit share split, such as they do with all of their other events.
2. **NZMA, NI & SI Championship Roster & Timing:** The challenge is finding space in an increasingly busy season. The traditional end of February date is proving difficult to secure. One option is to hold the NZMA Championships in mid to late March. A second option is to integrate our event into the Athletics NZ Combined Events Championships. With the Australian Masters T & F Championships often held in early April, a March timing seems sensible. The NI & SI could be retained as NZMA events to assist in coordinating. This season Christchurch and Masterton are hosting these events as part of a larger interclub meeting.
3. **NZMA Role:** Our role traditionally has been to coordinate masters track & field championships, interact with OMA and WMA as and where appropriate, such as to verify members status for overseas events. This still needs to be done. We also oversee that our Constitution and By-laws are adhered to, however at times pragmatic decisions need to be made in the best interests of masters. We also maintain a list of all Island, National and Championships records and oversee the annual Athlete of the Year Awards. The challenge for NZMA is that fewer people are making themselves available to be on the NZMA Board, therefore the workload is unrealistic for those on the Board only.
4. **The future of the NZMA Board:** If Athletics NZ takes over the organising of our Championship events, then the NZMA Board could become the 'Masters Advisory Group'. Their role would be to advise Athletics NZ, and to ensure the needs of master's athletes are met. NZMA would maintain our records, create *Vetline*, update the website to keep masters informed and supply information to Athletics NZ that can go in their online newsletters and the ANZ website.
5. **Funding of NZMA / Collection of NZMA Registration Fees:** One suggestion is to create an NZMA Club within the Athletics NZ system. Athletics NZ collects the fees directly, plus a local Master's Centre fee (if any). Once NZMA works out its annual expenses, we work with Athletics NZ as to how this is funded. We currently have \$70k in the bank and the Fourth World Veterans Games Trust has approximately \$270k in assets. What does NZMA need funds for? *Vetline* production costs, awards, medals, uniforms and Board travel expenses for the one face to face Board / AGM meeting held annually. Do we fund this out of our reserves / Trust fund or continue to levy NZMA via membership fees and/or event entry fees?
6. **The future of the Local Masters' Centre:** Is it time for Masters' Centres to become an operational committee attached to the local Athletics NZ Centre or perhaps merge with the Centre's Track & Field Committee?
7. **Greater inter-Centre Communication:** Since Covid 19 has been around, Athletic NZ introduced monthly

Centre Zoom meetings as a way of communicating information and seeking feedback from around the country. I would like to introduce these for Master's Centres.

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

On a personal note I became involved in athletics admin to give something back to a sport I am passionate about. It would have been a lot easier just to be a runner. Over the years I have learnt many of the procedures required in the background to run the sport, such as online entry systems, websites and setting up Meet Manager and running the meeting, plus I have used my desktop publishing skills to create programme booklets. Without seeking any key role, I somehow ended up being the NZMA President and Chairman of numerous volunteer athletic organizations within Canterbury. I stepped up simply because then was a need and I had the time and developed the skills. It was not easy at the start. The trouble is, the more you know, the more you end up doing, the harder it is to be replaced. There are so few people with the skills I have acquired, and it takes time, plus the desire and effort to learn. It is a challenge to find a replacement.

Part of my sense of wellness has come from belonging to the athletics community and creating a connection with the many competitors and friends whom I have met over the years. I am proud of the contribution I have made to the sport over the past 13 years. The most pleasing being involved for three years to get Nga Puna Wai completed to replace QEII.

However, this is meant to be an enjoyable experience or why else would you get involved. I also assumed it would be a distraction from 'real' work and life's stresses, plus an opportunity to perform when my body lets me, in a sport I am 'okay' at. For ten years now I have been dogged with injuries, which I believe are stress related.

All leadership roles come with a certain amount of responsibility, pressure and stress, and an expectation to 'deliver'. Most of the time I do enjoy the challenge. However, at times it does feel pretty overwhelming to be the one in charge, making decisions that will impact on the future of the sport, especially when you are going against tradition. If governance was all I had to do it would be easier, but all the extra stuff in the background that goes into making events happen, adds an extra dimension to the stress I have to deal with ... not always successfully.

I am sure I speak for many of you when I say that with fewer people involved in the sport and even fewer people stepping up to take on the various roles on committees and learning the tasks required in the background, it increases the pressure we all feel at times. That takes a toll on your enthusiasm for the sport, affects your ability to compete and your own personal sense of wellbeing.

Having rules and regulations for an organisation is important. However, there is a place for being adaptable and pragmatic. I would like to think that is one of my strengths. I prefer to look at the big picture and remind myself why we are doing what we are doing, rather than being hamstrung by sticking strictly to rules and regulations. We are here for all people involved, the athletes, officials, coaches and supporters. I see my role as bringing everyone together, so we all have an enjoyable experience. Having to deal with the impacts of Covid 19 has meant that some adaptability was forced upon us. It has certainly added to the workload and stress.

What I have learnt in recent years is to be more vulnerable and willing to share how I am really feeling. To be supportive and display more empathy towards others. To acknowledge the effort that so many of you put into keeping the sport going, by simply saying 'thank you', rather than taking people for granted. By accepting that that we cannot do things the way we used to, and that it is not possible to please everyone. As a Board we have been forced to make some pragmatic decisions and I appreciate that a majority of our members were understanding as to why those decisions were made. We are now entering into a new era, as we work more closely with Athletics NZ to secure our events on their athletic calendar.

Within the next couple of years, I would like to be in a position where I can decide to stay involved or not. At the moment if I walked away, I am not sure who is there to take over what I currently do ... and feeling like I

don't have that choice adds to the pressure! I do know if I really needed to step back I would. Currently, I am committed to staying and ensuring that when I do step down, the organization is in good hands.

We are about to hold the 2022 - 2023 NZMA Championship in Wellington. With fewer officials these days, there will be need for many of you to step up and help. I know many of you will do that willingly and not just think 'someone else will do it!'. If you are part of this sport, it does feel great to give something back.

We have some challenges to address as we work towards ensuring the future direction of Masters' athletes. We have until the start of 2023 season to work out the current issues and redefine the MoU with Athletics NZ.

If you are young and passionate about this sport, perhaps it's time you stepped up to help!! I appreciate that is a challenge with young families and being at the beginning of your careers. However, the more people who get involved, the better we can share the load. The future of your sport is in your hands!

Andrew Stark
NZMA President