



4 May 2020

To: Members of the Management Committee, World Bridge Federation

From: The Australian Bridge Federation and New Zealand Bridge Inc

On 16 April we received notification from the WBF that due to the outbreak of COVID 19 the 2020 World Youth Team Championship and the 2020 World Bridge Games had been cancelled. The plan or aspiration of the WBF is to hold these events in the early part of 2021 along with the 2021 calendar of events.

The priority behind the WBF decision was the health and welfare of its affiliated base, the National Bridge Organisations (NBO); registered members; and people attending events.

The plan is commendable but does invoke challenges for NBO's like ours that it is not consistent with the priority of health and welfare of its affiliated base, registered members, and people attending events.

As two NBO's representing over 50,000 affiliated bridge players in Australia and New Zealand we thought we would share our present thoughts and concerns. We assume other NBO's have or are experiencing similar thoughts, challenges and/or concerns. Committing to an extended programme in 2021 is probably beyond our means for a variety of reasons set out later in this letter. We are keen to explore if there is an alternative way of delivering an international programme in 2021.

As our respective economies have gone into lockdown, bridge clubs have had to close their doors. Consequentially there has been no revenue and clubs are having to resort to reserves to pay usual operating expenses. Many clubs are in a dire position and face the prospect of permanent closure which would cause hardship for their members. We must remember the bulk of club membership is centred on companionship and fellowship. In New Zealand we have undertaken a "health check" of clubs and now have a reasonable understanding how long they can survive in the present environment.

We know Governments around the world are looking at ways to unlock their economies. There are 3 elements that will influence how quickly governments can unlock their economies- testing, contact tracing, social distancing. The latter will undoubtedly be the largest obstacle for clubs. Bridge involves proximity and contact unless we move to separation using devices of some sort. Further considering the demographic of club membership many are of an older age group and are vulnerable

to this virulent disease. The question on our minds is how quickly will clubs return to play and in what form.

As NBO's we earn our revenue in two ways. Through an affiliation fee and through masterpoints earned at club and tournament play. With no club sessions and tournament play, revenue to the national organisation has also dried up. If we are going to retain Clubs, it is inevitable we will have to consider some form of financial assistance. This could include deferral of fees, grants, cash injections, etc.

All the above has a significant impact on our finances and our ability to support an international programme, particularly a doubled-up calendar.

Countries around the world have closed their borders. It is hard to envisage borders being opened until there is a vaccine. Economies cannot afford a second wave. Even if players can fly, they may face quarantine at point of entry and on their return home. Meaning players may have to lock in 6 weeks for a two-week event. At a personal level, players may have lost their employment, or their business may have been severely damaged by COVID 19. We need to ask whether players have the financial capacity to support multiple events in one year. There is enough commentary in the media that international travel could be severely hampered until 2022. We hope not but it might be the reality we have to face.

In summary:

1. We need greater transparency and communication from the WBF. Decisions are being taken without consultation with NBO's. To improve communications, we recommend that the WBF issues a note following each meeting outlining what is happening and/or being worked on or alternatively the Zonal presidents issue a note.
2. We are concerned about the congested 2021 WBF calendar.
3. We are concerned that the WBF calendar may conflict with national events (e.g.: The Gold Coast Congress) that significantly contribute to our financial position.
4. Our finances are taking a battering. Sending teams twice to Italy in 2021, plus zonal championships and playoffs may not be possible for New Zealand and Australia. We do not know what is going to happen with the price of overseas flights but there is good reason to think fares will increase.
5. We are having to offer financial assistance to clubs. Does the WBF have a plan to support NBO's that will struggle to survive COVID 19. Whilst we are undertaking a health check at a local level maybe the WBF should be doing the same at a national level.
6. We are concerned if we do not participate, we will lose our position and right to play in subsequent events. There needs to be a waiver if an NBO cannot afford to send a team in 2021. We recommend that if teams have participated in either 2016 or 2019 then they are granted a waiver.
7. A requirement exists that there is a zonal playoff. If travel is curtailed why can this not be played electronically. With appropriate controls and oversight, we see no reason why a zonal playoff cannot be held online. In this regard we plan to work on a technical solution in conjunction with Laurie Kelso.

We would like to know whether running one or all these events in 2021 can be done online.

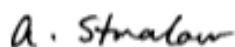
Our priority must be the grass roots of the game- a need to rebuild, to reopen our clubs, and get players back to the table. If we do not, we will not be able to support WBF events.

We are keen to hear from you whether the WBF will grant a waiver should NBO's be unable to attend events in 2021 (see summary note 6) and whether we can proceed to develop an online solution for zonal playoff (see summary note 7).

Stay safe, stay well

Best wishes

Allison Stralow



ABF President

Allan Morris



Chairman, NZB

cc. National Bridge Organisations