

Annexure A

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING (AGM) OF THE BOTANICAL SOCIETY OF SOUTH AFRICA 12 February 2019 at Kirstenbosch NBG in the Old Mutual Conference Centre.

Chairman's Report

No doubt everyone present today is aware of the difficult issues the Society has faced over the past three years. Resolution of these matters culminated in a Special General Meeting last August with the election of an Interim Council and the adoption of a new constitution that gave members a greater say in the running of the Society. Normally the Society's AGM is held in September of each year, but that was not feasible given the time frame, so now this Annual General Meeting has been called by the Interim Council to allow members to:

- Elect a council for BotSoc that replaces the Interim Council,
- Present audited financial reports for the three successive financial years ending March 2018 and
- Hear about the progress that has been made in respect of the priorities that had been identified.

We must record that at the time of our election, we did not comprehend the scale of the task, nor the time it would take to produce the results we aimed for. However, we believe that the most pressing issues have been addressed and feel confident that the ones remaining have been identified, thereby allowing the new council to prioritise and apply themselves to the tasks on hand.

We are grateful to Dr Bruce McKenzie, who has been caretaking BotSoc for the past few months. In order for the incoming council and the General Manager once appointed to have insight into BotSoc activities and matters needing urgent attention, he has undertaken to write the following reports:

- A summary of project restricted and reserve funds
- An analysis of operational costs and recommendations in respect of financial support to branches including a review of the current levy of R39 per member.
- A summary and recommendations of contractual arrangements with partners, staff and other service providers
- Preliminary considerations for a new model for member subscriptions and classes.

This will allow the new Council and General Manager to 'hit the ground running'.

This chairman's report focuses on our progress over the last six months following the above mentioned Special General Meeting.

By now it is common cause that a rift had developed within the Society. On the one hand the control of the Society and its assets had increasingly been centralised. Successive previous councils had allowed this to occur over the past few years. On the other hand, many members and branches wished for greater participation and empowerment both in the affairs of the Society, and that of their branches.

On 17 August 2018, a new constitution was adopted by more than 91% of members voting and this interim council elected.

Your Interim Council committed to focus on the following in the 6 months from 17 August:

Restoration of confidence in the financial affairs of BotSoc.

The 2016, 2017 and 2018 financial reports, signed by the auditor and by the Interim Council, have been made available to members. I am pleased to state that these reports offer a fair presentation of the financial state of the affairs of the Society. In his Treasurer's Report, Mr Christie will elaborate.

Consolidate the relationship with SANBI

SANBI have expressed their commitment to the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) signed with BotSoc in 2014. BotSoc has also been assured that there is firm commitment to the the founding principles underlying the MOA, namely that the land for our national botanical gardens has been granted by the government on the condition that an appropriate organisation from civil society, identified as BotSoc, was able to assist with this venture.

The MOA will be updated in September 2019 to ensure it remains fit for purpose for both parties.

Strengthening the service provided to members.

The Society instituted disciplinary proceedings against the former Executive Director in which she was charged with failing to uphold and act in the best interest of BotSoc. These proceedings resulted in the immediate termination of her employment on agreed terms, the details of which are confidential. More than that I am not at liberty to disclose.

Recruitment for the position of General Manager is currently underway.

In consultation with staff, a review of contracts and job descriptions for all BotSoc staff members is underway. We congratulate Mrs Simone van Rooyen on her promotion to Office Manager, effective 1 February 2019.

We wish to thank all our staff for their diligent and loyal support to the Society and its members, in particular through this period of turmoil.

Service Providers

After review by the Interim Council, the contracts of several consultants and service providers were terminated. This will bring about a significant saving in the 2019/20 financial year. We are confident that the contracts now in place are at market-related fees and necessary for BotSoc to operate and to fulfil its mandate and objectives.

Consulting with members and stakeholders

A successful Branch Convention was hosted in November 2018 by the Bankenveld Branch at Walter Sisulu National Botanical Garden and attended by council members and all the branch chairpersons. I would again like to thank Johann van den Berg and the members of Bankenveld Branch for hosting this event and for all the arrangements they made. The unique needs of each branch were recognised. Support from the national body has been offered in various forms including financial support. A request from the Lowveld Branch to host the 2019 Branch Convention in Mbombela to coincide with the annual SANBI curators week has been gladly agreed to.

It is with delight that that we share that a branch in the Garden Route, previously an interest group, has been established and we welcome Jo-Anne King, the chairperson

and Finn Rautenbach, secretary and curator of George Botanical Garden present here today. It is hopefully a first step of many to come!

We recognise that the current membership categories need to be addressed as a matter of urgency. A project is underway to consider and create alternative membership classes that will offer meaningful benefits, not only Garden related ones, but to all members and an initiative to encourage all persons to join BotSoc.

Practical Transformation plan.

A standing committee to progress practical and broad-based transformation is a priority. This will involve a focus on growth of membership across all demographics, enhance BotSoc's relevance amongst young botanical enthusiasts, build relationships with other entities with similar or complimentary objectives, etc. The new membership categories envisaged will facilitate this.

Communication:

The Botanical Society has significant media assets and brand value. Following a discussion document prepared by Mr Mike Martin, past CEO of Jakana Publishers, a workshop was held to discuss a cohesive strategy for publications and bookshops. It is recognised that BotSoc could play a significant role in creating access to and support for botanical art, scientific and popular publications. Whilst still in its infancy, the project has been met with enthusiasm from various parties.

In addition there is an urgent need for an intergated communication and promotion strategy that recognises the importance and value of interconnectivity in the electronic age we live in.

The creation of a new website for BotSoc and its members is well underway.

Veld & Flora continues to have a huge role to play in promoting and enlightening people, and creating a sense of wonder about the beautiful world we are lucky to live in. We are grateful to Ms Patricia McCracken who is providing guidance and has agreed to edit the March and June issues of Veld & Flora until a more permanent appointment can be made. It is our aim to allow members to elect to receive a hard copy and/or an electronic version.

Now, in the 21st century, BotSoc finds itself in a world where many conservation agencies and interest groups have been established in response to risks and threats to our environment. This includes SANBI, provincial and local authorities, many regional enterprises and community groups – the list is long. BotSoc aspires to be an umbrella platform for all agencies that support our mission. A place from which any such person or entity will find authoritative direction: recognised internationally as the custodian of our exceptionally rich South African botanical heritage.

A place where we all find a role to play.

As President Ramaphosa would say "Watch this space."

Thank you for your support, for attending today and for your attention.

Marinda Nel
Interim Chairman: BotSoc Council
12 February 2019.

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