



**RSL**  
Victoria

### **One Member, One Vote**

That the Rules of the Branch be amended so that each Life or Service Member directly casts a vote for the election of the State Executive Officers and Members.

Rules affected -10.3(d), (e), (f), (g) and (h), 13.9B (b)

Delete existing Rule 10.3(d), (e), (f), (g) and (h)

Replace with:

(d) A ballot paper for each Branch Officer listing the nominees as drawn by the Returning Officer (names drawn from a suitable container for the order of the ballot paper) and a copy of the nominee's League record provided under Rule 10.2(d) must be sent to every Member of the Branch at their postal, facsimile, or electronic transmission address contained in the register of members at least forty-two days prior to the Annual Conference.

(e) A Member is entitled to vote once for each Branch Officer election.

1) A Member may vote using one of the following means:

i. by returning their ballot to the Returning Officer by post; or

ii. by returning their ballot electronically to the Returning Officer by way of an online vote.

2) A reference to a Member in this Rule means a Life Member, Life Subscriber or a Service Member of the Branch who has paid the Minimum Subscription Fee by 30 April immediately preceding the Annual Conference.

(f) The preferential method of voting is to be used.

(g) A number must be placed opposite each name to indicate the order of preference for each nominee.

(h) The ballot paper must be returned to the Returning Officer as per the instructions provided with the ballot paper and must reach the Returning Officer at least forty-eight hours prior to the Annual Conference.

Delete existing Rule 13.9B(b)

Replace with:

(b) One such Ordinary General Meeting shall be held within sixty days immediately preceding the Annual Conference under the Branch Constitution to instruct the Sub-Branch delegates to the Annual Conference on how to vote on matters listed in the Agenda for the Annual Conference.

### **Rationale:**

The current system of delegate (*directed*) voting does not reflect our organisational mood, nor societal expectations more broadly and is no longer consistent with governance best practice; it is outdated and undemocratic in nature. In 2021, 5 Sub-Branches had their voting disallowed at State Conference due to electoral process compliance issues. Members of the League deserve to have their individual voices heard, and this remit seeks to ensure that RSL Victoria remains a representative and leading ESO for future generations of veterans.

In Australia, male and female suffrage – an adult’s right to vote in electoral processes – was achieved in the mid-1800s and early 1900s respectively. Veteran suffrage – today referred to as One Member, One Vote – was first raised in 1928 by John Honeysett, a Sub-Branch President in Canberra. However, nearly a century later, democracy in the RSL is still to be achieved.

### **Strength**

One of the failures of the RSL’s current electoral process is the distribution of votes. One member, One Vote would address this failure, advantaging those who choose to vote, rather than those who do not.

The largest Sub-Branch in Victoria has approximately 1100 Service and life members and this entitles it to eight votes at State Conference. Of its approximately 1100 service and life members, only twelve (1.09%) attended its 2021 Ordinary General Meeting (OGM). Conversely, the membership of Warragul Sub-Branch in Gippsland is entitled to one vote. This is despite eighty of its service members attending the 2021 OGM. The current system of voting in RSL Victoria provides a disproportionate representation to large, city-based Sub-Branches with potentially inactive memberships while smaller regional-based Sub-Branches, many of which enjoy active memberships, are unfairly disadvantaged in having their vote represented.

### **Opportunity**

In 1928, Honeysett proposed a democratic electoral model as a strategy to increase engagement within the League. His motion was widely supported within the ACT and a Special Congress was called to vote upon it. The motion failed when Honeysett’s opponents argued that members who failed to attend meetings forfeited their right to vote. In the 1920s, the delegate model was widely used by other organisations: it was best practice at the time. Today, those opposed to One Veteran, One Vote cite that a lack of veteran engagement in the RSL represents a significant barrier to implementing a democratic model and appear to echo the argument that those who do not attend meetings forfeit their right to vote. With the advent of the internet and almost 100 years of technological progress, empowering each member to vote – as Honeysett proposed in 1928 – would dramatically increase veteran engagement within the League.

Due to COVID, voting is being conducted electronically at both a Sub-Branch and state level across the country. Recently, in Queensland, City-New Farm Sub-Branch implemented a confidential electronic voting platform to compliment voting at general meetings. In addition to the 23 members who attended and voted at the general meeting, an additional twelve (52%) members engaged with the process by voting remotely. This outcome supports Honeysett’s 94-year-old prediction that a democratic model would increase engagement within the RSL. In NSW, 26% of eligible Service and Life members voted in their latest elections. Their current President, Mr Ray James, received double the personal vote of his nearest opponent. Consequently, he has said that knowing he has the confidence of his members, he feels he has a genuine mandate to lead.

## Weakness

A criticism of One Veteran, One Vote is the financial burden – reported to be up to \$40,000 – that implementing the model would impose on RSL Victoria. Feedback from the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) is that an opportunity may exist for RSL elections to be conducted for free due to RSL Victoria's charity status. A requirement for RSL NSW to pay to conduct their election in 2021 was due to COVID complications that did not allow the AEC to conduct their voting. Consequently, it was conducted by a private contractor. This is not the normal process, as shown by RSL WA preparing for its next election in coordination with the AEC.

Another justification for denying the adoption of a directly democratic model is that members are not sufficiently informed to vote on important RSL matters: that it is better that the decision be made for them. This attitude is patronising and further disenfranchises members. It also raises concerns about League leadership and its ability to convey important information to veterans. All elements of RSL leadership – from the senior executive down to Sub-Branch committees – share the responsibility of disseminating important information to members in a timely and appropriate manner. This involves working together to achieve a common goal: an engaged membership.

## Threats

One Member, One Vote is perceived by some as an attempt by the younger generation to gain control of the RSL. John Honeysett attempted to introduce democratic process into the RSL in 1927 when a majority of veterans were aged in their 30s. One Member, One Vote has never been about younger veterans versus older members: it has always been about equality and increasing engagement amongst Life and Service members regardless of age, gender or service. With veterans of varying experience represented in the State's 22,000 Service members, One Member, One Vote promises increased member engagement and that the future of the RSL is carried equally amongst ALL.

For over one hundred years, Australian servicemen and women have fought to defend democracy: after 105 years, is it not time that all veterans are afforded the right to practice democracy in the RSL?