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# 49th Annual General Meeting Minutes

Thursday, 5th December 2024 at 7:30pm AEDT, online via Zoom

Chaired by Helen Freris, Acting President

Welcome -Helen Freris

Acknowledgement of Country-Stephen Belbin.

Amila Dedovic, Communications Coordinator, gave the roll call of those present.

**Declaration of proxies held:** Two - Jim Siver, Phillip Tilley.

**Attendees:** Adrian Watson, Amila Dedovic (staff), Andrew Webster, Angela Jaeschke (staff), Barry Chapman, Bernadette Jolley, Bill Jolley, Cameron Roles, Carmel Jolley, Channtey Heng, Chelsea Bartlett, Cheng Hock Kua, Dan Stubbs, David Rankin, Deb Deshayes, Doug McGinn, Emma Bennison, Fiona Woods, Francois Jacobs, Garry Adler, Graeme Innes, Gregory Page, Helen Freris, Jennifer Parry, John Hardie, John Machin, John Krishnan, Julie Nixon, Karen Knight, Karen Passmore, Katrina Taylor, Kristy Stichter, Layal Hage (staff), Lee Chong, Lynne Davis, Maree Fenech, Marie Shang, Martin Stewart, Michael (Mick) Baker, Neale Huth, Parimala Srikanteshwara, Paul Price, Peter Rickards, Poh Machin (associate), Prue Watt, Raj Reddy, Ramona Mandy, Robyn McKenzie, Samantha Marsh, Sarah Reilly (staff), Scott Erichsen, Skye de Vent, Sondra Wibberley, Stefan Slucki, Stephen Belbin, Stephen Jolley, Susan Thompson, Tony Grant (associate), Vaughn Bennison, Wendy Sara.

**Apologies:** John Simpson, Christine Simpson, Barb Williams, Maryanne Diamond, Fay Rohrlach, Michael Janes, Phillip Tilley, Vicky Jolley.

## Minutes

### Receipt and approval of minutes of the 48th Annual General Meeting held 14th December 2023.

Moved: Helen Freris. Seconded: Stephen Belbin. Carried.

### Receipt of the Annual Review 2023-2024:

#### President's Overview – Helen Freris

Helen Freris provided an overview of the past financial year at BCA. Sally Karandrews (Aurisch) served as CEO until October 2023 and under Sally's leadership, BCA developed a new strategic plan to strengthen partnerships with key blindness service providers and increase member engagement. Sally also ensured BCA’s voice remained prominent across various forums. We sincerely thank Sally for her invaluable contributions during her tenure.

In October 2023, following a thorough recruitment process, we welcomed Deb Deshayes as BCA’s new CEO. Having previously served as General Manager of Projects and Engagement, Deb brings a strong focus on member and partner engagement, positive team culture, driving continuous organisational strengths and leading through change. We look forward to her leadership in driving BCA’s vision forward. Helen thanked both Sally and Deb for their dedication and leadership.

From a governance perspective, the Board, led by Fiona Woods, completed an update of BCA’s Constitution, which was passed at a special general meeting after member consultation. Helen extended her gratitude to the directors and members who provided input, and Baker McKenzie for their contributions to this important work.

Moved: Helen Freris. Seconded: Susan Thompson. Carried

#### Chief Executive Officer's Summary – Deb Deshayes

Deb provided an overview of the past financial year which included personnel changes and preparation for funding transitions, noting that BCA successfully advanced its purpose and implemented its Strategic Plan in 2023-24.

BCA’s policy and advocacy work continued to focus on the Disability Royal Commission. Concurrently BCA facilitated member consultations for the federal review of the National Disability Insurance Scheme, hosting four online and seven in-person sessions across Australia.

Deb was pleased to report that BCA has formalised its partnership with the Jeffrey Blyth Foundation to promote a focus on further fundraising, developing a bequest program and continuing the scholarships program. We were delighted to support three applicants to the BCA Hugh Jeffrey scholarship program in this financial year. Longstanding collaborations continued with Vision Australia (renewing a three-year Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)), and renewed an MOU with EverAbility. Additionally, BCA received renewed funding from the Community Broadcasting Foundation for an audio production project. As project funding from the Department of Social Services concluded, BCA focused on building its volunteer base to sustain key initiatives such as Peer Connect groups, BCA Inform and BCA Conversations.

Deb thanked the collective efforts of directors, staff and committees, and expressed her gratitude to Helen for her outstanding leadership as Acting President and Vice President.

Question from Susan Thompson: Who was the organisation that you said we had developed an MOU with? Deb’s response: EverAbility, previously known as VisAbility.

Question from Stephen Jolley: Was it the project Deb mentioned regarding audio description or audio production? Deb’s response: audio production.

Question from Gregory Page: Introduced himself as a new member and asked for support on how to engage with BCA. Layal Hage’s response: Layal offered to contact Gregory the next day to provide more detailed information and support.

Moved: Helen Freris. Seconded: Kristy Stichter. Carried.

### Receipt of 2023 Audited Financial Statements and Auditor's Report.

Andrew Webster, Treasurer, presented a summary of the financial statements and auditor's report previously circulated to members and available on the BCA website.

Andrew extended his thanks to members who supported BCA over the past year through regular donations and the BCA Backers program. Gratitude was expressed to the Jeffrey Blyth Foundation for their significant contributions. Andrew acknowledged Peter Goebel’s generous bequest, honouring his memory and commitment to BCA’s mission.

Thanks were expressed to the Not For Profit Accounting Specialists (NFPAS) team including Nikki Watson and Erin Kingisepp. Finally, he expressed thanks to Alison Flakemore, Shawn Wang and the audit team at Crowe International for their thorough audit of the accounts. Andrew thanked members Mick Baker and Rocco Cutri who have brought their financial expertise to Finance, Audit and Risk Management (FARM) committee meetings and welcomed Chris Hegios who had recently joined FARM.

Question from Peter Rickards: I believe that during the year the staffing situation had to be significantly re-evaluated because of the downgrading of advocacy funding. Is that correct? Andrew’s response: Andrew clarified that while advocacy funding remains a challenge, the staffing reductions at the end of the 2024 financial year were primarily due to project funding. There were a number of staff whose contracts were due to end and given that funding was not secured, we were unable to renew their contracts. He reiterated that donations continue to play a vital role in supporting BCA’s work.

Question from Ramona Mandy: I think it's always wise to review investments periodically, because world events occur which affect markets and it might always be good to review your portfolio to change the proportions of where things are invested, so I was wondering how often does BCA meet with their portfolio managers to review the shape of the portfolio investment portfolio? Andrew’s response: Andrew explained that BCA meets with its portfolio advisors every six months, with the last meeting held in November. Andrew took the opportunity to thank Advisors David Wells and Anu Souvannavong, who participate in these discussions to review BCA's portfolios. The share portfolio is actively managed, involving continuous evaluation and occasional strategic buying and selling to optimise performance. Additionally, BCA reviews its organisational risk profile periodically—twice in the past five years—to ensure investments align with the appropriate risk tolerance.

Follow up question from Ramona Mandy: I presume that when they meet with the FARM they would either advise that we recommend that you down sell in this area/ or because of the Ukraine war we recommend you buy this or don't buy that/ or put forward recommendations / or at least give you some rationale behind what they've done? Andrew’s response: Yes, the latter – they tell us what they’ve done over the course of the year and why.

Question from Susan Thompson: I'm just interested in the rationale about having our own investments versus investing it in the Jeffrey Blyth Foundation. Is that about immediate income, or is it about diversity? Or is there some other reason? Andrew’s response: Andrew advised that the money was given to us, and so we did invest it ourselves. BCA’s portfolios are managed by Shaw and Partners, ensuring consistent advice. Dividends from the investments are used to support operational activities, a strategy that has been effective for the organisation.

Follow up question from Susan Thompson: my other question relates to the processes and documentation around finances and the MOU that was signed at the point that Blind Citizens NSW incorporated into BCA. One of the stipulations was that money be spent primarily on people who are blind or vision impaired in NSW. I note that when we had the funding crisis earlier on that we didn't replace the part time NSW Advocacy Project Coordinator, so I'm keen to know how we document kind of at least in spirit adherence to this element of the MOU. Deb’s response: Deb advised that we didn’t need to necessarily have a staff member residing in the state as part of the contract, but that Martin was providing support for NSW remotely. Deb advised that the change occurred in the following financial year which would be detailed in the next AGM.

Question from Sondra Wibberley: I have two questions, one of which is, what sort of areas do we have funds invested on the stock market? And the second question is what informed the decision to change to outsource the accounting services from an internal financial manager? Andrew’s response: Andrew answered the first question advising that BCA’s investments are managed as a package, based on risk profile and expected returns. The core portfolio consists of solid ASX 100 or ASX 200 shares with potential for modest capital gains, while the income portfolio is constructed of bank hybrids. The focus is on the overall performance of the portfolio rather than specific shares. BCA also follows an investment policy that excludes shares related to tobacco, alcohol and gambling. He added that ethical investing is one of the ongoing discussions that occurs during the review of the portfolio.
Andrew answered Sondra’s second question and explained that BCA moved from an in-house finance manager to engaging a not-for-profit accounting firm due to the specialised nature of the financial activities required. After a successful trial period, the firm was retained for the current financial year, leading to significant improvements. Key benefits included a larger support team ensuring payroll was processed smoothly and better documentation that facilitated a smoother audit process.

Dan Stubbs congratulated Andrew, Deb and the team on a beautiful set of numbers during a challenging year, adding that outsourcing the financial provider was an excellent move.

Martin Stewart shared a heartfelt tribute to Peter Goebel, reflecting on his generosity and character. Martin, who played cricket with Peter for many years, spoke of Peter's continued support through donations to their club. Martin expressed deep gratitude for Peter's generosity and the positive impact he had on others, noting that Peter’s support for BCA is a testament to his kindness and generosity.

Helen thanked Andrew for his work and diligence as Treasurer, and Rocco and Mick for their contributions. Andrew thanked Mick for his wisdom, support and advice over the last ten years.

Receipt of the 2024 Audited Financial Statements and Auditor's Report moved by Helen Freris. Seconded: Peter Rickards. Carried.

### Confirmation / appointment of auditor for 2024-2025

Helen moved the motion that Crowe Australasia continue to act as BCA’s auditor for the 2024-2025 financial year. Seconded: Emma Bennison. Carried.

### Reports

#### Jeffrey Blyth Foundation

Angela Jaeschke, co-Company Secretary, presented the report on behalf of Maryanne Diamond (Chair, The Trustee for the Jeffrey Blyth Foundation) who sends her apologies.

For the year ended 30 June 2024, the Foundation received $254,179 of income from investments, and after asset re-valuations reported a combined net increase from investments of $345,810. Its operating costs were $62,060. No donations were received during the year. The combined income and costs resulted in a net increase from operations of $283,749, compared with a profit of $427,312 last year—noting that last year included $250,000 of increase in the valuation of the portfolio. This increase from operations was allocated between the funds in the proportions of 31% for the General fund and 69% for the Shirley fund. A total of $162,000 including scholarships was granted to BCA. At 30 June 2024, the Foundation was holding $3,793,418 (up by $121,750 from last year).

Approximately 68% of the Foundation’s assets are held in shares, with the remainder taken up by interest bearing or fixed interest securities. The average increase in shares for the year was 11%, compared to 8% for the $284,000 surplus.

Last year the Foundation and BCA signed a Memorandum of Understanding.

During the year BCA engaged a fundraiser with the Foundation contributing 60% of the costs. Unfortunately, the appointment was not successful so together with BCA, a review of the fundraising approach is being undertaken.

The Foundation has determined its grants for the 2024–25 financial year. Each grant will be paid in two equal instalments.

• This year’s grant to BCA from the General fund is $47,890.

• This year’s grant to BCA from the Shirley fund is $105,110.

• This year’s total grant from the Foundation to BCA is therefore $153,000. This amount is up by $6,000 (or 4.1%) from last year.

In addition to these ongoing grants to BCA, the Foundation has continued its support for the Hugh Jeffrey scholarships Program. The contribution last year was $13,500, and $15,000 per year has been allocated for future scholarships.

The company secretary is Tim Murton, and funds manager is Shaw & Partners. Maryanne thanked them for their support and advice this year. The Trustee of the Jeffrey Blyth Foundation has five members on its board: David Blyth, Ashley Blyth, Graeme Innes, Donna Purcell and Maryanne Diamond. Maryanne thanked her fellow directors for their support and diligence throughout the year. Maryanne was recently appointed chair of the Trustee following the resignation of Bill Jolley as a director and chair, and she took the opportunity to thank him for his huge contribution as a director from 2017 and chair from 2019.

**•** **Election Report for President, Director and NSW/ACT State Division positions and confirmation of NPC representatives**

Angela Jaeschke, co-Company Secretary, presented the Election Report.

This year, there were one President and three Director vacancies, each for a three-year term. The position of President is up for nomination, as Fiona Woods resigned from the board and as President in September 2024. Directors who have completed their 3-year term and will not be standing for re-election are Stephen Belbin and Francois Jacobs. There was also one casual vacancy, due to the resignation of Joanne Chua in early 2024.

At close of nominations, BCA received the following nomination for President: Vaughn Bennison. At close of nominations, BCA received the following nomination for Director: Garry Adler, Stefan Slucki, Rajdeep Reddy. There was one vacancy for President, and three vacancies for Director positions, therefore all nominees are elected unopposed.

There were four NSW and one ACT committee member positions up for nomination, each for a two-year term. The NSW members who served their initial term are Mark Scofield, Phillip Tilley. Kristy Quigg resigned from her position on the committee.

There was one further vacancy in NSW and one vacancy in the ACT. Nominations for NSW State Division: Phillip Tilley, Annette Sim. There were no nominations for the ACT State Division position, therefore one vacancy remains. There are two vacancies for NSW positions on the State Division.

National Policy Committee (NPC) call for expressions of interest. Interested members from Western Australia, South Australia, and Tasmania, were asked to express interest in the NPC. Expressions of Interest for NPC representatives: Stefan Slucki, Rajdeep Reddy. However, due to these 2 nominees also being appointed to the board as Directors, and the required participation of directors on the NPC, the board has called for a further expression of interest for members on the NPC. This EOI closes on 19th December 2024. The nominations committee will make selections based on the person's qualifications, experience and interest and on the need for the NPC to represent the diversity of our membership.

There were no Expressions of Interest received for the Finance, Audit and Risk Management (FARM) Committee.

Helen thanked Fiona Woods, who was the BCA President until September 2024, for her immense contributions. Helen thanked Stephen Belbin who has served as a Director for 15 years. Helen also thanked Doug McGinn who also served as a Director during the past financial year. Neale Huth acknowledged and thanked Francois Jacobs and Prue Watt for their contributions. Andrew Webster thanked Joanne Chua for her contributions to BCA.

Receipt of the Election Report moved by Helen Freris. Seconded: Kristy Stichter. Carried.

Helen thanked the many departments, organisations and individuals for their funding, support and commitment to BCA including but not limited to the Jeffrey Blythe Foundation, Shirley Fund, Guide Dogs Australia, Vision Australia, Vision 2020 Australia, EverAbility, Department of Social Services directly and via Australian Federation of Disability Organisations consortium, the Victorian Government through the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, Community Broadcasting Foundation, National Disability Insurance Agency, New South Wales Government through Department of Communities and Justice, Melbourne Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation, Australian Communications, Consumer Action Network, Justice and Equity Centre, Justice Connect, Baker McKenzie, Peter Goebel's bequest, and all the BCA Backers.

Helen also thanked the BCA staff and Directors for their work over the last financial year. She also thanked the NPC, the branch leaders, BCA representatives and BCA members for their contributions.

On behalf of the BCA team of Staff and Directors, Deb expressed her appreciation to Helen for her role as Vice President and Acting President throughout the year.

### Other business:

Vaughn Bennison introduced himself as the incoming President of BCA. He acknowledged the presence of both BCA members and representatives from other disability organisations, emphasising the importance of collaborative work in advancing the rights of the blind and vision-impaired community.

Vaughn acknowledged and thanked Helen for her role as Acting President. He further emphasised the responsibility that comes with being president, acknowledging the inherent challenges but expressing a willingness to learn and collaborate with others to continue advancing BCA's mission.

Vaughn noted the transition from his role as presenter of New Horizons but noted that he would continue to contribute, including an upcoming interview post-AGM. Vaughn expressed his thanks and eagerness to work with everyone in the months to come.

Andrew Webster welcomed Vaughn to the board.

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Meeting closed at 9:04pm.

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