

Summit - June 2009

Themes from the Consultation

Below is a synopsis from the consultation to date. Given that I am still in the midst of consultation, this represents a 'raw' summary of key messages (exhaustive by no means) from meetings and communication with almost 100 people within the Squash community.

A core principle in these discussions has been a commitment to unearthing the brutal facts – we cannot address things we don't have the courage to identify. All members have contributed with a view to adding constructively to the dialogue- feedback is not directed at individuals but it is about putting issues on the table. I thank everyone who has contributed.

Below are issues and opportunities that we need to *collectively face, collectively own* and the solutions will be a shared responsibility.

1. Poor communication

The new delivery structure will need to improve the flow of information throughout the organisation. Both the quality and quantity of current communication requires improvement. There are several perceived issues affecting the flow of information:

- The National Office fails to send out or facilitate access to information regularly. Poor communication was the most highlighted issue country-wide.
- Districts are perceived by some as a barrier to the free flow of information from clubs through to national office and national office back through to clubs and players,
- It takes a long time to get a response from the national office and questions often go unanswered.
- The volunteer nature of 11 District Boards/Committees demands a large relationship management resource from the national body and servicing these relationships can mean waiting for volunteers to have enough time to get to Squash stuff given that they have fulltime jobs. The net result though, is that this will have an impact on the timeframes and work of the national body.
- Personal relationships between individuals are perceived to have a large impact on access to and the distribution of information (in all directions). Communication is not seen as 'system' driven and there is too much subjectivity.

2. Decision-making and leadership

There were many themes that can be grouped under this heading and they all have a direct impact on the level of **trust** between the various levels of the organisation. The key messages include:

- The national office structure in addition to what national office actually does fails to reflect the values or **priorities** contained in the strategic plan. HP seems to be the only focus and this doesn't align with the majority of work/activities in the districts and clubs.
- A negative impact on the **credibility** of Squash NZ is a consequence of actions not matching words (i.e. "say one thing, do another),
- Decision-making – there is a sense that decision-making is not a strong, well informed process and that decisions are not followed by decisive action and broad communication with the membership. This has a negative effect on perceived levels of **transparency** and **accountability**.
- In the new structure, a clear process and pathway for clubs/regions to have an **influence on decision-making** would be welcomed. A clear and transparent process for consulting and gathering the views of members would be advantageous so that those who wish to contribute can do so.

3. View of Change Process

There is overwhelming support for things to change and the notion that we can work better. There is an understanding that several reviews have reflected this. A few themes have emerged around the change process:

- Exploring options of what the future could look like are being unnecessarily restricted by some hidden assumptions. In discussions, once these are managed, more options are explored and considered viable. In order to get the most out of this process we need to identify and challenge our assumptions.
- Change may manifest (at least initially) differently in different regions because there is not an equal or common benchmark/starting place. The way in which large centres and more remote centres work are considerably different. This needs to be recognised in the change process. For example, in smaller centres there is a much greater focus on working together across several smaller clubs (as a “union” or supportive network).
- We are not harnessing the power of the collective; the sustained and comprehensive sharing of information, experience and best practice across the sport is not happening.
- Don’t change things for change sake –work out what is working and leave it alone. The Grading system works so leave it in place.
- If the national office is to deliver better results across the sport, it needs to have the ability to direct focus, drive and monitor performance across the country.
- Locally or regionally based Squash staff are critical to the future development of the sport - and clubs really value this service. People expressed they were quite at ease if staff currently employed by Districts were to be employed by Squash NZ but remain based locally – it is the local connection and knowledge which is critical, not where the employment contract sits.
- As a sport there is a need to help clubs (who want to) capture the social/casual player. This goes with a sense that squash (clubs/branding/services/facilities) need to be modernised and updates.
- Get on and make it happen – no more talk!

4. Assumptions

In the discussions that have been happening there are several assumptions, some of which have wide implications, which need to be tested. Here are the major ones with clarifications:

- **The national body means “Auckland”:** the national body is responsible for the governance and development of Squash throughout New Zealand;
- **Any staff member employed by the national office means they will be based in Auckland:** employees may be based remotely and regionally. Technology and modern management approaches facilitate virtual teams;
- **Reducing the number of districts alone (without other change) will yield all the results we want:** the solution is multi-dimensional and must address relationships, trust, business development and system improvements not solely hierarchical structure;
- **The national office would remain as it currently looks in the new structure:** the national office is a part of this project and will be remodelled as part of the solution.
- **Blame rests solely in one camp and not the other:** relationships are two-way streets and blame cannot be laid at the feet of only one party. We need to be prepared to reflect on our own role in how we arrived at our current position.

- **Funding agencies require a separate regional body or they won't fund any regional projects:** the policies of funding agencies vary. Some may have this policy but many don't – there is no *one* rule. Careful analysis is required.

There are many solutions which become possibilities when we explore these assumptions.

5. National Role

Participants reported that they wanted the following from the national office as part of the new delivery structure:

- Strong leadership (communication, decisions, accountability, quality control)
- Club development (someone driving this including resources, tools, partnerships)
- Coach Development (coach education, coaching pathways)
- Business Development/Marketing (profile, sponsorship, funding strategy)
- Competitions and Events (calendar of events, national competitions, Grading List)
- Junior Sport and Schools Programmes (programmes targeting young people)
- IT, System Support and Resources (Coaches, Officials, Club Administrators)
- High Performance (Head Coach, pathways for achievement, international gateway)

There is a less easily defined but highly important role for the national body that involves **valuing and investing in the development of people** within the Squash community.

6. District Role

There are enormous differences in the perceived role and effectiveness of District bodies across the country; the difference in role going beyond the response to regional diversity to an actual different view of the **role** of the entity and any staff they may have. The district may have a mixture of many different features which may include:

- The district as the coordinator of competitions and events
- The district as the regional governance structure
- The district as the representation/democratic voice of clubs
- The district as the applicant and recipient of funding and grants
- The district as the developer and deliverer of services and products

The presence of paid staff and whether the district has a management committee or governance board are key factors in how and what the District does. There were several comments from club representatives that the conversion to “governance” didn't lead to better results and that they were more productive as “doers”.

There is support for District reform including the following:

- Reduce the bureaucracy at District level
- Increase focus on key deliverables such as district competitions and inter-club
- Return to a management committee focus (not governance boards)
- With improved national leadership, regional staff can stop “reinventing the wheel” 11 times over and focus on implementing national strategies and programmes. It is noted that this requires the national body to step up.
- Take employee management away from volunteers and hand-over to SNZ
- Questions were raised about the need for district bodies if the national body steps up to deliver – via regional staffing structure - the desired services and programmes (outlined above). The work of the ‘district’ as such would be around district competitions.

The main concern about these changes is trust in the national body to provide strong, transparent leadership which reflects the needs and interests of grass-root clubs.

7. Funding

The discussion around funding gave rise to the following messages:

- Funding is a concern for districts and there is a sense that funding is getting harder to get. This puts programmes and staff at risk at the district level which is a real threat to sustainability in the future.
- Members would like advice/direction from the national body on funding –best practice and collective opportunities.
- Will funding be increased or threatened by centralised model? Suggestions on this included that Squash NZ may maintain some shell entities to gain funding for local projects and implementation of national programmes. Such shell entities could be wound up if the rules changed.

8. Membership Affiliation Fees

The major theme around this topic was the need for much more clarity around the **value of membership**. What are people getting for their money?? The Grading List is well recognised as a benefit however beyond this the value for money is not clearly understood. Other key messages include:

- Simplification and transparency around levies and the budget would be welcomed. There is some misunderstanding about the money flow and that the national body gives a large percentage of the levies they receive back to districts.
- There is a lack of clarity over what levies are being spent on at the district and national levels.
- People are supportive of direct affiliation between clubs and the national body
- Majority of people don't believe the levy amount per person is too high; it is more a question of *value for money*. What are we getting??
- There is support for a revised model of affiliation fees where the perception that clubs are "taxed" and a system that encourages mis-reporting of numbers can be overhauled.