**Vintage Reds, Retired Unionist Group of Canberra & district**

**Convenor’s Annual Report to the 10th Annual General Meeting 18 Oct 2022**

I acknowledge that we meet today on Ngunnawal Land and I pay my respects to their elders past & present.

**Introductory Remarks:** From this vantage point, it is difficult to recall that our previous AGM, held on 5 Oct 2021, was our first meeting for many months of lockdown in the ACT. That did not mean that VRs had spent their time idly as it was clear that they were raring to go with pent up energy and a compass full of direction in everybody’s hands. And the following twelve months have proven ones of heightened activity and solid achievement which I hope you find properly reported on below.

**Membership:**

As at this AGM, Vintage Reds (CBR & district) has 108 members with an additional 20 or so ‘fellow travellers’.

**Vintage Reds Committee:**

Even with the best of intentions, nothing gets done until people actually do something and this year we have been very fortunate to have a hard working, creative and a ‘lean into the wind’ pre disposition in our committee: Jane Timbrell, Penny Lockwood, Helen Sutherland, Helen Wardrop, Anne Gunn, Bob McFadden, Jenny Miragaya & Irene Davies.

**Guest Speakers:**

In 2021/2, we were gifted with guest speaker bounty as we emerged tentatively into the new, post-C19, normal.

15 Feb ’22 Roslyn Emmerick, Advocacy for Inclusion advocate, spoke on the issues being raised at the on- going Royal Commission into Disability in OZ

15 Mar ’22 Dr Blair Williams, scholar at the Global Institute for Women’s Leadership (ANU) spoke on Women in OZ Politics with the then forthcoming federal election in mind

19 April ‘22 Tom Greenwell, ACT public school teacher and opinion essayist, spoke on public/private education in modern OZ, ‘Waiting for Gonski’

24 May ‘22 Charles Maskell-Knight, researcher and policy worker, spoke on behind the scenes on issues covered by the Royal Commission into Aged Care and where to from here

21 June ‘22 Heather Moore, social policy advocate and activist, spoke on modern slavery and its impacts in OZ

19 July ’22 John Falzon, social activist and advocate, spoke on homelessness in OZ

16 Aug ’22 Janine Kitson (Combined Retired Unionists NSW), Mary Yeager & Todd Pinkerton (UnionsNSW) spoke on plans for revamping the retired unionist organisations in NSW

20 Sept ’22 Soli Middleby, social activist, policy maker & aid worker in the Pacific, spoke on OZ in the Pacific, past, present & future.

**Campaigns:**

By far our busiest front of activity has been campaigns and they unfolded basically as follows:

**Aged Care**: The Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality & Safety (Royal Commission) Final Report presented to the then Federal Govt in Feb 2021 caused VR to call into together a small circle of member/scholars to research the Report in order to comprehend it and to produce some precises of its insights, learnings and recommendations for VR members.

This laborious exercise became a voyage across the issues, challenges and neglect of over twenty odd previous Reports by Govts of both persuasions. These factors were ever more clearly brought to the public consciousness by the C19 pandemic which began a public hew & cry for the 2021 Report to be the one to finally crossed the policy rubicon into deep diving action and budgetary commitments.

In May 2021, the then Federal Govt tabled its ‘5 Pillars’ Response to the Report in the May 2021 Budget Papers and our VR study circle went to work with extra vigor additionally armed with the ‘facts & figures’ discovered in a hitherto unheralded treasure trove sourced by an obscure government agency, the Aged Care Financing Authority (ACFA) and its the final report on the financing & funding of the aged care sector.

Interestingly, this agency was wound up, only a month later, on 30 June 2021 but it appears it may have made a phoenix like reappearance, at least in part, in Aug 2022 with the expanded Independent Health & Aged Care Pricing Authority –-some material and commentary was forwarded to you last month - so watch this space.

Again, the VR study circle produced some materials to VR members derived from both the Govt Response & the ACFA final report which was also utilised in producing the corflute and leaflet used during the 2022 Federal Election campaign.

The work of our study circle was also channelled into the discussions of the ACTU Retired Unionist Network specifically to win ACTU endorsement of aged care as a campaign matter and into a monkey survey questionnaire to major & minor party candidates during the election campaign but more about that in the campaign section of the Report.

**Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing (MACA)**: We extracted a number of issues from the Royal Commission’s learnings to take up with the ACT Govt both directly at Ministerial level and through Jane Timbrell at the ACT Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing (MACA). The following star amongst those currently being advocated:

* amendment to the ACT Human Rights Act to include Royal Commission template of human rights found in Recommendation 2;
* access to ACT Capital Linen for home care recipients laundry;
* extension of the ACT Official Visitor program to aged care esp home care recipients.

It must be said that the ACT Govt could be more responsive on these issues but we will persist.

The object of all this effort (which has changed now but not ceased) has been to keep aged care above the radar of public and political consciousness and to that extent, I think we can judge it a success – which, of course, brings with it an on-going watchful vigilance by VRs into the near future.

There are many to thank for this fruitful work and solid achievement, but several need to be mentioned: Janet Flaherty, Helen Sutherland, Jane Timbrell, and Jenny Miragaya.

Our work on, and interest in, aged care is on-going and you will see more outcomes of it in 2022/23.

**ACTU Secure Work** (late 2021/early 2022): The ACTU, sniffing the electoral wind heavily informed by the exposures by C19 of the insecure workforce upon whom we were all so dependent, launched a campaign to nail the issue into the public and political consciousness so it did not slip below the post C19 recovery but became an indelible part of it. The pragmatics of the campaign devolved to state and territory labour councils and given the VR interest in the federal electorate of Eden-Monaro we elected to assist UnionsNSW in its work there.

We organised both pre-and post xmas Secure Work leaflet distribution forays into Cooma, Dalgety, Berridale, Moruya and Tumut with as near as you can get to 100% coverage! For good measure, we also set up and staffed a pre xmas market stall at Cooma Markets where we spread the word and received back some very useful local political intelligence (particularly on the impact of the critical shortage of accommodation on labour supply in the Cooma through to Jindabyne zone). For this marvellous toil we have many, many VRs to thank.

This work helped us get into the Federal Election frame of mind with VR lobbying very strongly and ultimately successfully for the Federal seat of Gilmore to be included in the UnionsNSW menu of targeted seats.

We also participated in a zoom forum organised by the federal Member for Bean, David Smith, with the then Shadow Minister for Aged Care, Clare O’Neil who was not only receptive to some of our notions but also showed she was across the aged care portfolio with her take on the Royal Commission Report and Govt Response. Given the secure work imperatives at that time, the issues of Registered Nurses and Personal Care Workers employment and minimum care minutes together with the prospect of the contracting out of client assessments got a pretty good airing.

Again, many names deserve mention here but I go to just a few: David Perkins for his speciality in all things corflute, Nigel Thompson for his preparedness to go anyway to pop a leaflet in a letterbox.

**Retired Unionist Network:**

As you know, VR is an affiliate to both UnionsACT and the ACTU, the latter through the Retired Unionist Network (RUN) where Jane Timbrell admirably represents VR.

Hitherto, RUN had been a bit ramshackle with representatives from some States & Territories but not others. The policy and practical work done by VR leading up the federal election together with the deployment of a dedicated ACTU officer, was astutely employed by Jane to successfully lobby for Run to meet in Sept 2022 for the first time face to face in Melbourne at its inaugural national gathering hosted by the ACTU. There further steps were made for a national agenda for RUN and encouragement for a national scope for the Network.

So thanks to Jane’s persistence, all that organising and capacity development achieved during the ACTU Secure Work campaign (end ‘21/early ’22) and the 2022 Federal Election campaign can now be bedded down and put to use for the longer term.

In this regard, we were very pleased to be visited at our August ’22 meeting by a delegation from UnionsNSW (Mary Yeager & Todd Pinkerton) and Combined Retired Unionists Sydney (Janine Kitson) who are looking to revamp the retired unionist landscape in NSW with an eye to moving towards the VR approach. Already they have visited the NSW Central Coast with this in mind with more to come. There are already retired unionist groups functioning in the Shoalhaven and Blue Mountains which could be important building blocks in this endeavour.

All this augurs well for retired unionism. We are not passive spectators but activist in our own senior interests with the capability to talk in our words. We look forward to seeing the fruits of this good work in ’23.

No doubt the forthcoming ‘Voice’ referendum will be an opportunity for retired unionist activism.

Jane’s work on this project deserves a statue!

**Union rallies:** As you would expect, VR has supported a number of union rallies in Canberra (Health Services, Nurses, Child Care Workers and others) seeking to bring workers issues to the (then) tin eared Morrison Govt’s attention and to lock in the focus of the ALP & Greens during the election year. We have also recently attended a UWU Aged Care Workers rally at Parliament House since the election of the new Labor Govt which was attended and addressed by the Prime Minister.

**2022 Federal Election:**

All the work of the Royal Commission study circle and the ACTU Secure Work preliminaries came together in the 2022 Federal Election Campaign.

Jane’s persistent advocacy in the ACTU Retired Unionist Network for aged care to be elevated in the ACTU’s list of its campaign priorities was successful. RUN also adopted Jane’s initiative for a Monkey Survey of all major, minor & TEAL candidates with a menu of questions drawn in part from the findings and recommendations of the Royal Commission plus some supplementaries for good measure to identify aged care commitments beyond the rhetoric.

While at that point, the Opposition had not then finalised its aged care policies we were pleased to see that when Clare O’Neil did released them later in the election campaign it was clear the Opposition were on track to meeting a host of public concerns. And so it has proven under the new Aged Care Minister Anika Wells with the prioritisation she has invested in the legislation she has introduced and passed over the last few months.

Again, VRs responded to the call for the grunt work on the Survey – discovering the candidates and their contact details across 151 electorates where we found some candidates a lot easier to find than others. Thank you to VRs who contributed to this unglamorous but essential work.

But the long march didn’t stop there! Fortified by what we had accomplished in the ACTU Secure Work campaign, VR decided to embark its own contribution to the 2022 campaign by scripting and printing our own leaflet (15,000 copies) which were distributed during the campaign in the bottom end (largely Bateman’s Bay) of Gilmore and the top end of Eden Monaro (largely Tuross heads & Moruya) together with designing and printing our own corflutes (200) for use on highways and pre-poll. This effort was funded by donations from VRs.

I must thank again the VRs who responded to the early morning roadside corflute rosters on the highways into/out of Canberra. We have become very good students of prime locations many of which are also very good vantage points for the rising sun.

In the last week of the campaign, we retreated to the Canberra and spread our aged care and the Scotty ‘I don’t hold a hose’ corflutes along some of the major arterial roads. Interestingly, on the post election Sunday retrieval of our corflutes, we found not a single one of Scotty remained. Anecdotally, we have learned they became highly prized souvenirs.

The areas selected in Gilmore and Eden Monaro were the parts which the census illustrated had the highest proportion of their seniors population. We think we made a difference with both seats being retained by Members of the new Govt, one of whom has become a Minister in that Govt.

So to all the VRs who toiled long and hard in the field and to those who so very generously donated, I say thank you muchly for jobs well done!

We of course resume our vigilance on the federal aged care space as the new Govt and its activist Minister for Ageing, Anika Wells, implements Labor’s election commitments. What VR was able to demonstrate was that we are not only capable of doing the policy slog work but we are also pretty good at putting our time and money into the field – albeit that we all found muscles where we never expected to have to look for them. But most of all, amongst all the camaraderie and adventure, we felt we had given our best shot on an issue very close to our own lives.

VR members were all over the 2022 federal election campaign – from leafletting, stalls, corflute placement, sloganing, letter writing, postering, spending time away from home in Gilmore & Eden Monaro and just being generous in answering the call. So a special thank you to you all!

**Fellow Travellers:**

VR members continue to be active in other movements, particularly with anti war such as the Independent & Peaceful Australian Network (IPAN) Anti AUKUS and War Powers Reform and refugee action. This work illustrated the scope of interests pursued by VR members.

**Acknowledgements & Recognition:**

VR won recognition from the ACTU & UnionsNSW for its work on the Secure Work & 2022 federal Election campaign and from UnionsACT in its May Day Award for our contribution to the welfare of workers in the ACT.

**Where to from here:**

To nominate three matters I think deserve our attention:

**Aged Care:** We have a special job in aged care. With the trade union movement well able to take forward the workforce recommendations of the Royal Commission, it falls to us to keep the care of our senior citizens upper most in the minds and actions of politicians, policymakers and the general population. Our special position is that we bring together the eyes of workforce activists with the expectations of aged care clients. We are in the belly of the beast! So this year, it is more vigilance.

**Act Govt:** We need to smarten up the ACT Govt on its role in the aged care space, a space where they tread lightly and can do much more. One such area is retirement villages.

**The ‘Voice” Referendum:** This is a pivot point in our country’s history and progress and as senior citizens, we have a real place in seeing this referendum carried through

I am sure you will have your own nominations.

Nonetheless, suffice to say, we will have much debate and actions ahead by which to navigate our way across ’23!

**Conclusion:**

Finally, to reiterate my opening remarks, I would also like to thank Vintage Reds for their enthusiasm both at our meetings and in the campaign field. It has made for spirited and well informed comment, debate and outcomes at meetings and lively and adventuresome campaign endeavours which together add up to a year very well spent!

Garrett Purtill

Convenor, Vintage Reds of the Canberra Region