**Vintage Reds, Retired Unionist group of Canberra & District**

**Convenor’s Annual Report to 11th Annual General Meeting, 17 Oct 2023**

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

**Introductory Remarks:** The year 2022/23 has been a period filled with challenges and achievements for Vintage Reds (VR) as we have pursued a number of issues to the next level (retirement villages, home care & the ACT Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing), have maintained ‘care & maintenance’ briefs on a number of evergreen issues (aged care & the Royal Commission recommendations rollout by the Albanese Labor Govt) and have taken up the banners of new challenges (collaborations with the revived Retirement Villages Residents Assn, campaigning in the Federal & NSW State Elections) . We have much to show for our efforts but it would be remiss not to acknowledge that the end of our year sees many VRs totally pooped!

So let’s take a walk back over the year and take stock of our efforts and achievements.

**Membership:** At 30 June 2023, VR had 113 admitted members with an additional 20 or so ‘fellow travellers’. Committee member Robert (Bob) McFadden does an excellent job of keeping membership order.

**Vintage Reds Committee:** VR has been very well served by your active and engaged Committee of Jane Timbrell, Helen Sutherland, Penny Lockwood, Anne Gunn, Bob McFadden, Rob Parnell, Irene Davies & Jennifer Miragaya. Additionally, the VR Aged Care sub-committee (comprising Jane Timbrell, Helen Sutherland, Janice Flatherty & Garrett Purtill) has ably supplemented the work of the Committee with its research, advocacy and representations in regard to retirement villages in the ACT as well as monitoring the rollout of the Aged Care Royal Commission recommendations by the Commonwealth.

I thank each and all of them for their perseverance and effort this year.

**Guest Speakers:** Once again, we have been well provided with talented and stimulating guest speakers across a broad range of topics as well as VR debate.

15 Nov’22 Robert Baker, Australians for War Power Reform, presented in support of parliamentary decision making in relation to war making

06 Dec’22 Dr James McDonald, emeritus professor, presented on the frontier wars in the Canberra region

21 Feb’23 Dr Liam Byrne, ACTU historian presentation aborted due to technical difficulties

21 Mar’23 Adam Mayers, National Coordinator, Southern Cross Brigade, Australian-Cuban Friendship Assn, presented on developments in Cuban following a recent visit

18 April’23 Frances Crimmins, ACT YWCA, presented on homelessness amongst older women

20 June’23 Dr David Lee, UNSW lecturer at ADFA, presented on AUKUS and the recent significant strategic policy shift by the Albanese Labor Govt

15 Aug’23 Lilia Anderson, researcher with The Australian Institute, presented on stage 3 tax cuts, the current profit spiral and its role in driving inflation in Australia, and the position of the Reserve Bank

19 Sept’23 Paula Mc Grady, member of the ACT Indigenous Elected Body, presented on the merits of the Voice

**Campaigns & Advocacy:**

* **Aged Care & Retirement Villages:** Since the election of the Albanese Labor Govt in May 2022, VR has carried its interest in the findings and recommendations of the Aged Care Royal Commission into the reconsideration of that work by the new Government and its Minister for Aged Care, Annika Wells, and its outcomes in reprioritisation, urgency and timetabling as reflected in Budget uplift and implementation. Importantly, as a Labor Govt, the advocacy of trades unions covering the aged care workforce has been significantly and visibly re-weighted not only to effect wage increases, staff/client ratios, staffing level and skills and training but also to the qualitative benefit of clients most noticeably in care minutes.

With sector unions active and vigilant actors and watchdogs and the Commonwealth now leaning into the issues, VR has shifted its interest to in-home from where the vast majority of aged care recipients draw their care and support. And this re-orientation has brought VR into a zone of overlap between the Commonwealth (funding of in-home care packages) and the States & Territories (the growing subsector of senior residential re-location, retirement villages, regulated ever so lightly by those sub-national jurisdictions). Retirement villages are also a senior housing option (usually encouraged by stamp duty discounts and other incentives) very lucrative for those investors and owners of the corporate variety.

So 2022/23 has seen the VR Aged Care sub-committee ‘hit the books’ to get some basic research onboard as part of a campaign to find allies (the revived ACT Retirement Villages Residents Assn, and Michael Pettersson (MLA Yerrabi) and to advocate for enhanced regulatory scrutiny by the ACT Govt. These efforts produced the adoption (end of March 2023 of a Michael Pettersson Motion in the ACT Assembly to examine the establishment of a retirement villages Ombudsman. VR (and VR & MACA member Jane Timbrell) made submissions and actively engaged in consultations with government representatives. Sadly, when the ACT Minister reported back to the Assembly on 19 Sept, the result fell well short of VR (and others) objectives. Nonetheless, the Government has formed a retirement village working party of stakeholders, on which VR will now have two representatives, to further deliberate on sector matters. The inaugural meeting of the working party is set for 30 Oct. So incremental progress but this time from inside the tent.

As outlined above, VR has been very active across the retirement village front in the ACT and in the process developed a fruitful collaboration with the newly revived band of Retirement Villages Residents Assn led by the redoubtable nonagenarian, John Beagle, and his Executive. This group has really ‘walked the talk’ by mustering the numbers. This population is a difficulty one to mobilise, but John and his band have made a good and solid start and are also to be represented on the RV working party.

VR Aged Care sub-committee also participated in the consultations that followed the adoption of the RV Ombudsman Motion in the ACT Assembly, meeting with senior policy officers in the Justice & Community Safety Directorate and with the ACT Human Rights Commissioner with responsibilities in the RV space, and with MLA Michael Pettersson.

Of particular note here is that Jane Timbrell, as a VR member of MACA, was instrumental in successfully achieving the support of that body for a retirement villages Ombudsman and will no doubt continue her work as a MACA representative on the working party. So very well done Jane! And also congratulations to Jane, Helen Sutherland and Janice Flaherty as members of VR Aged Care sub-committee for their sterling toil on this campaign.

* **NSW State Elections March 2023:** VR is always up for an election and the NSW State elections were no exception. VRs worked at great length and effort in both Monaro (successful for Labor) and Goulburn (now a marginal seat). VRs discovered new villages to trapse, new coffee & lunch haunts and made lots of valuable observations by which to better understand those places and their voting habits. As usual, as a group, we worked for the UnionNSW part of the campaign and I must say that, however people feel about political parties, there is a genuine regard for the trade union movement which goes a long way to make this work worthwhile. Nonetheless, I think it is fair to say that we experienced new dimensions of the term ‘buggered’ as we reflected on our days’ work..

A huge, huge thank you to all VR campaigners and esp to Jane Timbrell for handling the logistics of this work.

* **The Voice Referendum:** More to say about this in the next Report but suffice it to say at this point in time that VRs have been active across Eden Monaro in particular (leaf lettering Tumut, on pre-polling and other volunteering) together with work in the ACT where the demand for volunteers has not been so hard to meet. A shout out to all VRs who have presented for this work!

Other Campaigns: VR members have solidly contributed to IPAN, War Powers Reform and anti-AUKUS activities and on all these spaces there will be more activity to come.

* **ACT Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing:** Once again, Jane Timbrell has held the VR banner of issues high in championing the causes of senior in ACT Govt thinking. From successfully advocating for MACA to support the RV Ombudsman concept (part of our original policy for the Official Visitors program to be extended to RVs) to urging for more practical policies for seniors, Jane has done VR proud.

**Retired Unionist Network:** The RUN continues to prosper and the work of VR has provided an impetus for the work of other RUN affiliates. Jane as our Campaign convenor represents VR and was instrumental in organising a gathering of retired Unionist groups in Melbourne late 2022 to put some shape to this activism. As unionists, albeit retired, we bring tried and true skills to our engagement with issues and have already succeeded in gaining active ACTU interest in seniors matters. As you already know, VR conducted its own mini aged care campaign (at its own expense) in Gilmore & Eden Monaro during the 2022 Federal Election. It would be fair to say that we can now talk about a retired unionist network in substance as well as in intention.

**Where to from here?:** The retirement village space is the one where our efforts should concentrate for the coming year. It is a convergence point for lucrative earnings by corporate investors and owners, a power imbalance between owner/operators and residents and a very, very light touch regulator in the ACT Govt…recipes for exploitation and bad acting. So more study and more activism ahead.

And with the Australian Govt finally getting to grips with residential aged care, VR should continue to follow the develppments in in-home care where the big senior numbers are.

So those wanting to dip their toes into the aged care waters, the VR Aged Care sub-committee is the place for you!

**Garrett Purtill**

**VR Convenor**

**17 Oct 2023**