**Vintage Reds Convenor’s Annual Report 19 Nov 2024**

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

**Introductory Remarks:** Vintage Reds has been busy, very busy over the past year, 2023/24. We have spread out and dug deep. We have widened the scope of our interests and concentrated on a few key topics of engagement with government. And that has meant a lot more work to which VRs have risen to the occasion and made indelible contributions. And as unionists, we have been endeavouring to bring to the attention of policy makers and decision makers that the welfare of workers in their retirement is as important as their welfare during their working lives. They are, for us, a continuum. It is hypocrisy to talk of the benefits of a post working life and then abandon those fellow citizens to the ravages of the largely unregulated price gouging market when they get there.

Over this past year we have also been keen students and observers as well as activists. VRs have read so much about the Aged Care industry (from residential aged care to home care, from Reports to submissions) and its many actors (bureaucratic, regulatory, owners, operators, community) with whom we deal and whose interests bear measurably on the lives of seniors, about the interests of those who live off seniors (from retirement village owners/operators to home care service providers).

The more we move into and amongst these circles, the more we know about the key actors in these circles, the more astounded we are by what we have discovered, that some public actors are there for their passivity, some private actors are there to plunder the retirement incomes of seniors, and groups who are there to represent individual seniors but not to change or challenge anything systemic.

At retirement, we enter a zone of our lives where seniors become completely aggregated, moulded in the policy makers minds into a single mud where we all look the same, whether it’s our ailments, our grievances, our expectations, our horizons. Retirement becomes a battle against limitations, against a shrinking world, against people and organisations who want to make decisions for us over our heads. It begins as a form of bracket creep and ends in the wholesale assumption of daily decision making by others.

Vintage Reds is composed of veterans of industrial and social struggle where obstacles and limits are to be challenged and overcome, where unilateral decision making is to be democratised, and the rewards of one’s labour are to be protected for one’s own benefit and enjoyment.

As Vintage Reds we are veterans of much study and learning, of much engagement with our fellow workers and citizens, and of wisdom and judgement accrued over time and experience.

So when we decide to take a position of a matter or issue, we usually resolve to embark on a course of action – whether large or small – to make a contribution – by way of the insights of our experience, the labour of our own advocacy and campaign efforts, the dollars of our donations, the comradeship of our solidarity.

And so it has been with the year 2023/24, a year of short marches and of long marches but certainly of advances in the matters and issues with which we have engaged.

**Membership:** VR corresponds to an activist list of 146 members which includes a number of comradely groups ie various Retired Unionist Groups in Brisbane, Sydney, Shoalhaven, Blue Mountains, and so on. VR Committee member Bob McFadden is our exemplary custodian of the membership list and of welcoming new members.

**Guest Speakers:** This past year VR has been fortunate in a broad range of guest speakers across a spectrum of topics and each of them stimulate a welter of questions and engagement from VR members. VRs have avid enthusiasms in a goodly number of areas and bring a great depth of informed interest to our meetings.

Oct ’23: n/a

Nov ’23: emeritus Anglican Bishop George Browning on ’Palestine: where to from here?’

Dec ’23: VR Lunch

Feb ’24: VR 10th anniversary – Ged Kearney & Sally McManus

Mar ’24: David Perkins on ‘IPAN & AUKUS’

April ’24: Wendy Prowse, CEO ADACAS on ‘representation & advocacy for seniors in the ACT’

May ’24: Emeritus Professor Amin Saikal on ‘recent developments in the Middle East’

June ’24: n/a

July ’24: Jon Richardson, Visiting Fellow ANU Centre for European Studies on ‘The War in Ukraine: Russia’s imperial history & practice’

Aug ’24: Clara Filippi, ANU PhD student on ‘Recent ‘events’ in Kanaky/New Caledonia’

Sept ’24: Jon Falzon researcher Per Capita think tank on ‘Neo liberalism’

Oct ’24: Michael Hiscox on ‘Intervention into & administration of the CFMEU’

Nov ’24: Dr Andrew Hughes on the outcomes of the 2024 ACT Elections & ‘the Challenges & Opportunities for ACT Labor in the next 4 yrs’

**Campaigns/ Advocacy:** VR has been involved in a number of campaigns over the year and to assist with each of them we have established several committees: the Neoliberalism Comm and the Aged Care Comm. These two committees, under the auspices of the VR Comm, complement one another by dealing with different aspects of the same issues. For example, on one of the favourite topics of interest, housing for seniors, the Neoliberalism Comm delves into the ideological questions arising from the thirty-year saturation of this country’s policy making in economic rationalism and how that resulted in the Howard reforms of the 1990’s to produce a split in the treatment of accommodation for seniors into residential age care (Cwlth) and retirement villages (States/Terrs). The Aged Care Comm trawls through the policy and regulatory avenues in these two streams looking for opportunities to bring VR advocacy and activism to bear.

So VR has become better informed through the work of the Aged Care Comm about residential aged care through study of the Royal Comm Report, the Aged Care Taskforce Report, Govt Responses to these Reports, Budget Papers and Senate Estimates Hansards while the Neoliberalism Comm has been keen to look for opportunities to attack the ideology that has monetised the personal care sector generally and the aged care zone in particular.

There are several examples of this dual approach:

**The first** is the pursuit by VR of a proactive approach to the regulation of retirement villages by the ACT. With the making of the Retirement Villages Acts in various jurisdictions (incl the ACT) circa 2012 came the light touch regulator. In our case, that is Access CBR. VR lead a campaign through 2023 for the appointment of a Retirement Villages Ombudsman. The campaign led to lobbying of Yerrabi MLA Michael Petterson for support in obtaining a Motion of the ACT Assembly to examine the establishment of such an Office. Sadly, the Report to the Assembly on this Motion failed to support this regulator. But as a consolation prize, the Minister offered instead the establishment of a Retirement Villages Working Group of stakeholders (RV residents, RV owners & operators, lawyers operating in the sector, VR itself and several ACT Govt agencies) which has had quarterly meetings throughout 2024. While no miracles have transpired as yet, simply being in the same room with these interests and advocating directly to them has made for some movement (begrudging and glacial as it is) that would not otherwise have been there. We think that our presence and participation has been informing and alerted us to opportunities for more work. As the VR delegation contains members from both our Committees, we have been well armed with analysis and argument.

**The second** is the participation in the consultations and submission process for the making of the forthcoming Age Friendly City Plan for 2025/35. We think our work here has raised the debate a notch above the ‘more macrame for seniors approach’ to one in which seniors’ issues evolve into the forefront of ACT Govt policy thinking by taking head on matters such as seniors accommodation, health and homelessness. This is a policy zone contoured in much complacency and with nearly a quarter of the ACT population over 60yoa, it is timely we got some dedicated attention. VR attended a lengthy consultation session at Dickson Library and invested much study in supporting materials and research to compose our submission. VR submission was as much a critique of past and current ACT governments tokenism and even indifference as well as one proposing recommendations for actions to be adopted.

With the new ACT Govt formed, we expect the new AFCP to be released soon and hopefully it will be accompanied by the submissions made. You will have seen some of the outcomes of this work in the two half page ads in the Canberra Times (05 & 12 Oct editions) headed ‘Senior Canberrans have a housing crisis too!’ in which we drew attention to seniors’ homelessness, seniors’ poverty in private rentals & seniors’ in retirement villages. Atop each ad was the VR banner.

VR is keenly aware that we are challenging Canberran stereotypes of seniors as comfortable superannuants lazing by the territory’s beautiful lakes in summer and sloshing down the region’s alpine slopes in winter… with nothing but the pressure of attending monthly VR meetings in between! As retired unionists, we have experience in taking on stereotypes - my favourite amongst which is the mantra from employers, when confronted by the union in relation to some industrial matter, that they and their employees are ‘just like family’!

Seniors are a serious constituency with serious issues to contend with for which superannuation benefits are no compensation. Government policy makers need to remove their blinkers and put on multidimensional lenses to engage with seniors in some deep dives for solutions to some pretty obvious problems, not least of which are homelessness, poverty in private rentals and retirement village regulation.

With the announcement of the new Minister for Seniors, I reminder VRs that we will be maintaining our efforts to bring ACT Govt attention to bear on seniors.

In conjunction with the efforts above, VRs have achieved representation on several Govt bodies as platforms for further agitation.

Jane Timbrell has had her term on the Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing renewed and played the role of a one person ginger group on the Council advocating for the above issues to be included within the MACA submission to the AFCP. She also represents MACA on the Retirement Village Working Group and has heavily invested in putting some motion into its work. In the first half of 2025, MACA will hold a housing symposium for which it was granted $8000 by the ACT Govt, so another platform for VR to organise.

**Committees:**

**VR Committee:** I would like to thank the members of the VR Committee (Jane Timbrell, Helen Sutherland, Maggie Smyth, Bob Mc Fadden, Rob Parnell, Glenda James, Penny Lockwood, Anne Gunn & Garrett Purtill).

**Neoliberalism Comm:** This Committee consists of the sterling dynamic trio of Helen Sutherland, Penny Lockwood and Maggie Smyth. Some heavy lifting scholarship has been done by this group from which we benefitted during the preparation of both our submissions this year.

**Aged Care Comm:** This Committee consists of Jane Timbrell, Helen Sutherland, Maggie Smyth, Janice Flaherty & Garrett Purtill. This Committee is soon to be joined by Wilma Davidson. Helen, Janice & Garrett also represent VR on the RVWG.

*Note: These three Committees meet serially on the first Tuesday morning following the monthly VR meeting at Blueys (Tradies) in Dickson.*

**VR Website:** Managed by the inestimable Anne Gunn and ably abetted by Pamela Buckley, the VR website contains tonnes of chunky bits, information and thoughts.

The debate, the ideas, the efforts, the endless reading, the selfless volunteering to campaign, the interests in so many campaigns (both old & new), the commitment to act and the inexhaustible collective power of a decision to do something…these are credentials which aged but do not. And I thank you all for your work this year.

**Retired Unionist Network (RUN):** Jane Timbrell remains the VR stalwart representative for Canberra on the RUN which meets remotely monthly. Jane has recently assumed the role of RUN newsletter editor. Jane is also an inexhaustible missionary for RUN, recently attending a meeting of VR Brisbane and the Sydney Retired Unionists Group on her vacation! The ACTU, to which RUN is affiliated, lends RUN a good ear and it is a tribute to the work done by the affiliated that RUN is gaining in standing with the ACTU as a credential for its own work on behalf of retired workers.

**ACT Election ‘Oct 24:** The ACT Assembly Elections took place on Sat 19 Oct and while the Party numbers (if not the same Members) remained the same afterwards, the Assembly will see two Greens replaced by two independents, both of who will soon be receiving representations from VR to discuss issues relating to seniors in Canberra. It would be fair to say that the last Assembly pretty well coasted ‘relaxed and comfortably’ to the finish line. With new Members, hopefully some urgency and spirit will surface in the Assembly in conviction, engagement, debate and outcomes. For our part, VR will persevere with its efforts to engage with Members to raise their level of interest and engagement with the welfare of seniors in the ACT.

It has been our practice to engage fervently with the trades union movement in ACT Elections. This year, each union did its own thing and so did we. I have outlined above the form this took with the two half page ads in the CT. The principal reason for taking this route were that a cost benefit analysis of the expense of the ads versus flyers & corflutes & distribution came out pretty much the same. So the Committee decided to spare our members of weeks of traipsing over Canberran hills and dales and elected to proceed with option one, the ads. But our members did not go idle with many of them signing up for pre-poll rosters as well as working for their preferred candidates.

**Other Campaigns**: Through the year, VRs have been active in a number of other agitations and expressions of support two of which deserve special mention.

The consistent position of VR in opposition to AUKUS has been maintained in all manner of fora and I would like to thank David Perkins for his unstinting leadership on this front.

The other is the support for the Palestine people by the students on the ANU campus over many months through the UnionsACT meals roster team, both cooking for it and delivery. This admirable selflessness is largely otherwise unrecognised but I want to do so now.

**Where to from here:** Vintage Reds is a band of retired unionists who punch above their weigh in activism and advocacy. We plan to do more of both in the coming year. In doing so, as all good unionists know, no space is freely given. It has to be won. And VR has won its place at various fora and we have not wasted a moment of our time in them.

On behalf of our Committees’ members and myself, I want to thank all VRs for their support and comradeship in our year of thinking and doing work and we look forward to being the beneficiaries of your goodwill in 2024/25.

I wish you each and all a pleasant and restorative end of year break and look forward to our work next year. END