

Chairman's Report – 2023

Dear members,

I am proud to present the Chairman's Report in this, the 100th year of Leichhardt Bowling and Recreation Club.

Firstly, I'd like to thank my fellow directors David Smedley, Garry Talbott, Greg (Ed) King, Scott Bowers and Kylie McCartney, and Secretary Manager, Baz.

It has been a privilege to work with you through what have been some of the most challenging years of The Bowlo's 100-year history. The club's financial position leading into the global pandemic of 2020 was nothing short of catastrophic. What has been achieved since is remarkable. The initial objective of 'let's save the club', quickly transitioned into 'we need more tables and chairs'. Very few clubs boast such a united and passionate executive team that put progress over self-interest and politics, which is often the downfall of so many not-for-profit clubs.

As volunteer directors, we have all spent countless hours, often sacrificing precious time spent with family and loved ones. Our 100th AGM is a very fitting time to acknowledge and honour all our efforts, because, as we know well, there are no miracles at The Bowlo just hard work and a love of the club.

The Board would like to express our gratitude to our sponsors, Manning's Funerals, Pilcher Residential, JCM Excavations and Grifter Brewing Co. Your unwavering support this year has been invaluable, fuelling the success of both our sporting clubs and registered club. We look forward to our continued collaboration in the year ahead. Thank you to Craig Stephens, our Greenkeeper, for maintaining our greens to world-class standard. We also extend our sincerest thanks to Jan Priest for 28 years of unwavering dedication to the club as Bar Manager. Emma, Wendy, and all our bar and kitchen staff, thank you for your efforts this year.

We'd also like to thank the volunteer tradespeople who gave their time, often at short notice, to ensure that the roof wouldn't leak, the toilets would flush, and the lights would come on.

It's no small thing the level of volunteerism that has poured into the club through our toughest years. It's no coincidence we were able to survive and grow to see our 100th Birthday. To all our volunteers, thank you. You are the spirit of Leichhardt.

We continue to see remarkable financial growth while navigating numerous challenges that have presented themselves this financial year. A 53% increase in revenue, with the lion's share coming from a 68% increase in bar sales.

It has been incredibly encouraging to see the strategic direction we've taken. With a greater focus on outdoor dining and entertainment, beverage and food, we continue to see outstanding results. On that note, we are currently running an open tender for our kitchen, which is a keen area of our focus for the year ahead.

Most recently, we have invested in new financial systems to help us clearly identify the areas in which we can improve. This has already led to some significant wins, with a projected \$30,000 worth of savings on eftpos transactions in the year ahead, among others. Although we are seeing growth in our various revenue streams, the club's financial position remains fragile.

The club continues to strengthen its connection to the broader Leichhardt community. Our visibility has improved exponentially in recent years, a long way from the little suburban bowling club tucked away in the back streets of Lilyfield. It's gratifying to be recognised as a community club that supports others. We've seen a 590% increase in sponsorships this financial year, which include the Leichhardt Cygnets, UTS Wanderers, Glebe and District Hockey Club, The Rusties touch football team and Leichhardt Swimming Club.

As a team, we are committed to building meaningful relationships with local and state institutions. We work with Norton Street Festa, Leichhardt and Balmain Liquor Accord, Leichhardt Business Chamber, Bowls NSW, as well as our local council and state representatives.

We'd like to thank the local businesses that we have collaborated with throughout the year. Great Meats Co, Brew Ha Ha Coffee Roasters, Grifter Brewing Co and Lily Fields Distilling Co. Congratulations Shannon and Jen from Lily Fields Distilling Co. on their numerous awards this year, in particular receiving a gold medal in the Australian Gin Awards. Our partnership is one that is appreciated by many members and visitors.

The club continues to inspire many others around the state. We regularly receive visits from clubs representatives seeking inspiration and advice on how to pivot their business model in the way that we have. Our Secretary Manager Baz Compton recently offered some of our expertise on a panel discussion for Bowls NSW which explored ways in which clubs can be profitable, better engage with their local community, grow membership and promote lawn bowls.

This financial year alone, \$170,000 has been invested towards enhancing our 50-year-old clubhouse, facilities and its surroundings. These included artificial turfing, landscaping, and furnishing of our family friendly area, outdoor seating, misters and pathing, repairing concrete paths and the installation of a new grease trap. Works were also undertaken on the kitchen, bathrooms, roofing and air conditioning. We also purchased new large TV screens and a projector. With an aging clubhouse, these costs continue to keep our expenditure high and will be ongoing for some time.

We are pleased to announce that we have successfully completed the final stages of a major sustainability project. Energy efficient water heaters, lights, fridges and draught beer system are now in operation. These enhancements sit alongside our enormous solar system, the second largest in the Inner West.

There is a long and ever-growing list of projects that we would all love to see come to fruition. Our financial standing means that these works must be prioritised accordingly. Upgrading our audio-visual systems to become the go-to venue in the Inner West to watch the 2024 Olympics and other live sporting events and giving our bathroom facilities a facelift are some priorities.

We are happy to report the continued growth in memberships which included 650 people joining as social members this financial year.

This number does not include the numerous bowlers that have joined our respective bowling clubs, the Leichhardt Lions and Lynx. Thank you to all those on our bowling committees including Biff, Geoff, Webby, Kylie and Marie.

It was an incredibly successful year on the greens. Congratulations to our Grade 3 players who qualified for the State Playoffs, Geoff Seton on being awarded the NSW Disability Bowler of the year, and the inaugural recipients of our Manning Family Trophy, Teisha Swindale, and Spirit of Leichhardt Centenary Shield, George Wardell and Craig Rutherford.

The Manning Family Trophy is awarded to a new bowler that has taken to the sport, encourages others and regularly contributes to the registered club and game of lawn bowls. The Spirit of Leichhardt Sheild is awarded to someone that regularly represents Leichhardt Bowling Club in the game of bowls, displays etiquette on the green and is consistently available should the club require someone to step up and play. Congratulations to everyone.

Finally, the Board would like to offer a big thanks to all our members and guests, without your support we would not be still operating today. We look forward to spending many more good times at The Bowlo with you all in 2024.

Go The Bowlo!

Sincerely,

Alistair Scott
Chairman, Leichhardt Bowling & Recreation Club

Secretary Manager's Report - 2023

Dear members,

I am proud to present the Secretary Manager's report in this, the 100th year of Leichhardt Bowling and Recreation Club.

From our humble beginnings as a shed with no walls to the thriving sporting and community club of today, the previous century has seen our club and our sport grow, shrink, change and develop to continue to meet the needs of our community in Leichhardt. We're still guided by the simple principle of our founding members: "To secure the green and clubhouse to the club and the game of bowls in Leichhardt in perpetuity".

The final quarter of a century of our rich history has been the most dynamic in our club's, and our sport's, history. In the previous decade alone, we have seen 52 bowling clubs in the Greater Sydney Region close and the most reliable census data from Clubs NSW, pre-COVID, tells us that most small clubs in the state are suffering financial duress.

While there are various reasons for this decline, a primary causes across the state is the maturing business model of smaller clubs, ours included, that have spent a large portion of the last century relying on gaming as their primary revenue raiser.

This year we have seen substantial growth in all our revenue streams, including food, beverage, memberships, bowls fees and gaming, but the composition of that is changing.

Ten years ago, poker machine revenue made up 45% of the club's total revenue, in 2023 it made up just under 16%. It's very clear that the 'golden years' of clubs running on poker machine profits are long over. We are not shying away from this, we welcome the challenge. While gaming is still a profitable part of our business for now, we are working strategically and readying the ship to reduce our reliance on poker machine revenue as it declines in clubs like ours across the state.

As a result, we have focussed on our club amenities – such as our new beer garden, upgraded family area and outdoor offerings – as well as our beverage, food and entertainment. To this point, we have just launched an open tender for the operation of our kitchen.

Under the leadership of our Board, 2023 has seen astronomical bar growth of more than two-thirds year-on-year, but we are still struggling with profitability. These growing pains are most evident in the significant increases in wages and the cost of goods. We have been further hamstrung by substantial repairs and maintenance costs.

While I'm sure our members and guests have noted the increased amenity in the venue, 2023 has been another year of significant increase in "out-of-sight" maintenance, repairing and replacing old and redundant plant fixtures. The list of works is exhaustive but a simple example to demonstrate the challenges we've been facing is early in the financial year we significantly upgraded our kitchen which included changes to our roofing to replace some equipment that had been in service since 1973. After many frustrating attempts by various trades people, some hard work and creative thinking by bowling members Jeff McGuire (plumber) and Pete Swindail (bathroom expert and all-round fixer upper) finally managed to mitigate the indoor water feature which has regularly appeared in my office and the foyer in heavy rain.

There is still a substantial number of capital expenditure items that need to be addressed, but I am very pleased that for the first time in my almost 5 years here we are no longer held hostage to aging plant fixtures that need to be repaired or replaced.

As the auditor notes, financially, 2023 has not come to a strong finish and further we have been hampered by operational and logistical growing pains that come hand in hand with our astronomical growth, but I would like to remind our members that it was only a few years ago that it was looking quite probable that we would not be trading today in this footprint.

Despite the challenges that we face, we are seeing growth in all the right places and there are no signs of this growth slowing.

The clubhouse and outdoor areas are looking the best they have in years, and we are in a strong position to continue to transition to not only a financially sustainable but thriving sporting and community club.

Finally, as we approach the end of our 100th year of trade, the Board would like to thank all our members, directors, volunteers and staff for their continuing dedication to serving the club and our community here in Leichhardt. It has been a challenging finish to our first century of trade, but I am proud of what we have all achieved and even more excited about the future.

Sincerely,

Sebastian Compton
Secretary Manager, Leichhardt Bowling & Recreation Club