

Strategic direction of Victorian Orienteering

Whilst the present club structure of orienteering in Victoria has considerable strengths (such as club loyalty and, for a number of clubs, good financial capability), fundamental economies of scale make this unsupportable in the long term.

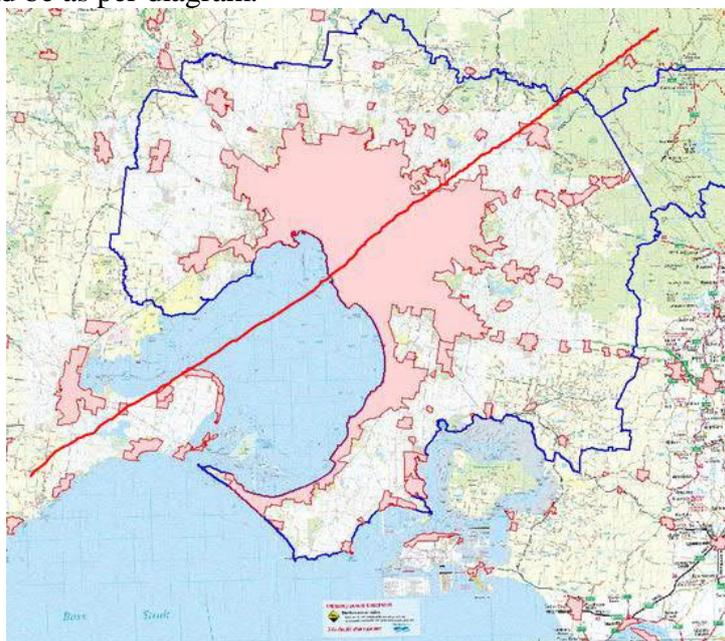
It is my opinion that a restructure is inevitable and any investment of funds or energy that does not match a more sustainable formal arrangement of assets and personnel is wasteful at best and possibly threatens the future of the sport in this state.

One option is to dissolve OV and have clubs directly affiliate with the national association (as per the AFL model). However this has implications with regard to the arrangements OV has with State Government bodies. Additionally, this approach does not resolve the issue of too many small clubs in Victoria.

Another option, which I think is more practical, is to merge all of the Melbourne clubs into one, two or maybe three clubs. ARDF would be the sole exception to this, as discussed below.

I am very aware that at this moment a number of readers are saying “over my dead body”. Unfortunately this will literally be true. C’est la vie. It is inevitable. Club mergers and dissolutions have happened before and will again.

Two new Melbourne based clubs need to be formed. I will call them Melbourne NW and Melbourne SE. They may be totally new or two existing clubs may rename to start this off. MFR could well be the name of one of these clubs. The geographic split that gets growth areas in each region and very, very roughly similar populations would be as per diagram:



Whilst competitors cannot be compelled to join a particular club just because of their residence, most members of the clubs will generally be from the region they represent as this makes club logistics and functioning easier. Existing members would have the choice to stay with their current club or change to their choice.

A possible way this would happen is as follows:

TK and CH will fold soon anyway. Members will either join BG or Melbourne NW.

BK will split NW and SE (it already has issues in this regard).

DR, NE and YV will mostly become SE.

MR will be in NW.

ARDF will need to formally align with *one* of the combined clubs, particularly for all non-radio orienteering matters. As it is also affiliated with the WIA it cannot restructure as easily as other clubs. Apart from ARDF, the concept of a club with a single strength is flawed. MFR, for example, cannot thrive if its only strength is in high level foot competition. Members who develop other interests will leave.

To do this in one action is impractical. Apart from the constitutional and administrative issues to attend to, there is the matter of the investments already made in club uniforms and signs. The first step will be clubs forming effective long-term partnerships. The next step will be the amalgamation of clubs at the administrative level with old club names becoming brands, if you will, rather than representing legal entities. So DR and the Lyrebird would become a brand of, say, Dandenong Valley Emus Orienteering Club Inc*. It may take a decade to fully transition. But this does not mean that this cannot start today.

A formal partnering of existing clubs and members will also start the generational change required to implement a better structure. Like many other orienteers, I do not want to have to work with members of rival clubs. But I do believe there is no sustainable alternative – witness the inability of any single club at the recent carnival to fully supply enough trained volunteers to cover all aspects that were needed to run a major event.

Amalgamation of rural clubs is not as practical or effective. There needs to be a small number of rural clubs as currently exists. They also need to be stronger but this is not so much a structural matter.

No person, club, OV or OA can force this type of change upon the general members. However, those clubs who embrace a new strategy that gives them the membership numbers to be able to fill all club roles (be it club treasurer, club coach, club promotions officer or president) without resorting to arm twisting or begging, will be the clubs that have a long term future. The rest will die. It is simple economics.

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*As far as I am concerned, the DVEOC will be the biggest, best and most successful orienteering club in the Southern hemisphere and will win the Australian Champion Club Trophy every year until I die.