

11 July 2018

Dear BotSoc Member,

THE WAY FORWARD FOR BOTSOC

Members have been swamped in the past few months by numerous communications from Council and Head Office on the one hand, and from Kirstenbosch Branch and members of some of the other Branches on the other hand. Ordinary Members must, we suspect, be suffering from information overload and conflict fatigue, and would love to get back to a stable Society where they can once again participate in "*the conservation, cultivation, study, enjoyment and wise use*" of our magnificent floral heritage.

One thing must be clear to all Members, whether or not they are following the debate: The Society is not in a good place at present and urgently needs a healing hand to bring Members back together with a unified purpose.

The writers of this letter are the proposed members of the new Interim Council of BotSoc. We do not wish to dwell on the raging debate and finger pointing that is taking place. We want to spell out what we consider our function to be should we be elected, and how we intend to go about achieving a revitalised Society. We want also to provide access to the basic information relevant to the revitalisation of the Society, because it is all but impossible to locate it on the main BotSoc website. We have therefore arranged for it to be posted on the Kirstenbosch website www.botsoc-kirstenbosch.org.za. and encourage all other branches to do likewise in the interest of their members.

The Special General Meeting to be held on 17 August 2018

The purpose of this meeting is:

- to replace the existing BotSoc constitution with a new one that entrenches Member democracy and secures the historical situation where Branches are entitled to employ staff, operate bank accounts and own assets, and
- to replace the present Council of the Society with an Interim Council.

The Kirstenbosch website carries the notice of the SGM and vital information about how to get to the meeting, or if you cannot, how to register your postal vote.

Members of the proposed Interim Council

The CVs of the new Councillors can be seen on the Kirstenbosch website.

It is very important to note that the primary purpose of the Interim Council is to bed down the new constitution and put into order the financial reporting of the Society. Once this is achieved, the Interim Council will call an Annual General Meeting at which, among the normal business of an AGM, nominations will be called from Members for the election of a new Council in terms of the Constitution.

What the Interim Council proposes to do

Consult widely

It is essential for the Society's Council to get back in touch with the Society's members. We intend to travel to each of the Branches to inform them of the changes and, importantly, to hear the views of Members around the country about how to advance the Society's objectives.

Provide guidance to Head Office management

Over the past few years, increased centralisation has taken place, which has been detrimental to the Society and has had the effect of stifling enthusiasm and activity at Branch level. It is our intention to review these aspects of Head Office authority and management. This review will particularly relate to branch affairs in line with the precepts of the new constitution and will establish what improved management systems need to be put in place, paying attention to the specific needs of each Branch's own area.

Inform SANBI

SANBI is among its other functions, the owner of our magnificent National Botanical Gardens. BotSoc's relationship with SANBI goes way back and has historically been very close, to the undoubted benefit of both organisations. This relationship has been encapsulated in a Memorandum Of Agreement between the two parties, which is still in force. No doubt the SANBI Executive has been a very concerned onlooker and we shall request a meeting with SANBI as soon as possible.

Develop a transformation plan

Some years ago the then Council spent a lot of time drawing up a transformation plan to bring the Society's objects to all sectors of the South African public. Nothing was then done to implement it. We aim to dust this off and bring it up to date or rewrite it if necessary and commence the process of making it work.

Improve communication

There is no excuse in this day and age not to have an accessible and informative platform to keep members informed of present achievements and proposed activities and projects. We shall endeavour to ensure that the Society's Executive provides such a platform. We envisage that a three year budget and operational plan will, after approval by the Council, be posted on the Society's website. This may only happen after the next AGM when the new Council has been appointed by Members.

Improve financial reporting

The recent management of the Society's financial reporting has been shocking, to say the least. We shall, using outside financial consultants if necessary, do all that is required to restore confidence in the Society's financial reporting. The 2016, 2017 and 2018 financial statements will then be put to Members for their approval.

Distribution

We have requested that this letter be sent to all Branch Chairs to forward to all their members. We have also requested Head Office to publish it on the Society's website.

It's up to you

No member based organisation can last for long if it loses touch with its members. We have told you in this letter how we intend to go forward. However, we cannot achieve anything without the support of the Society's members. So please, if you are in favour of what we say above, vote to support the draft resolutions at the SGM on 17 August 2018 to enable us to achieve our objectives.

Yours sincerely,

Dave Henry	Membership Number: S11/34321
Bruce McKenzie	Membership Number: S08/71655
Bongani Mnisi	Membership Number: S01/69197
Eugene Moll	Membership Number: S08/13681
Sershen Naidoo	Membership Number: 80007
Marinda Nel	Membership Number: S02/40819
Brian Christie	Membership Number: S02/64268