

Proposal 1

Best way for the Synod Standing Committee to Meet

That the Synod:

1. Reduce the ex-officio members on the Synod Standing Committee to 6 members:
 - a. Moderator
 - b. General Secretary
 - c. ex-Moderator (for 12 months after the term of their office expires)
 - d. Moderator-elect
 - e. UnitingCare chairperson
 - f. Wesley Mission Queensland chairperson.
2. Reduce Synod elected members to the Synod Standing Committee from 10 to 8.
3. Allow the Moderator to have power to nominate up to 2 additional ex-officio voting members to the Synod Standing Committee based on specialist skills / circumstances at any point, for a period to be determined by the Moderator.
4. Increase the term of elected members to the Synod Standing Committee to 3 years.
5. Request the Assembly Standing Committee to grant an exemption, as per Regulation 3.10.1, from Regulation 3.7.4.1(a)(iii) and to make an alternative Regulation to allow members of the Queensland Synod elected to the Synod Standing Committee to serve for a period of three consecutive ordinary Synod meetings, provided that such persons are members of the three ordinary consecutive Synod meetings.

Background

In the history of the Queensland Synod there have been several iterations of the Synod Standing Committee (SSC).

The Curtis Review in the mid-1990s led to the formation of a Synod Leadership Team (SLT) which included the Moderator, the General Secretary, relevant chairs from the (then) commission structure and members directly elected from Synod. This body was chaired by the General Secretary. The members of the SLT were also members of an elected larger “Council of Synod” that functioned as a widely representative body consisting of about 30 members.

The “council of Synod” met quarterly and the SLT met monthly. Alongside this structure was a Mission Advisory Forum that advised the SSC on mission priorities. It included presbytery, chaplaincy and mission research specialists. The Mission Advisory Forum became defunct in the early 2000s.

The Curtis model was replaced by the current SSC model in 2013. This model is based on the Synod in Session electing from its members those it believes have the gifts and skills to make decisions on behalf

of the Synod between its meetings. Ex-Officio appointments include Chair of UnitingCare; Chair of Finance and Property Board; Chair of Board for Christian Formation; Ex-moderator, Moderator-Elect; Chair of Remuneration and Nomination Committee. Standing Participants include Associate General Secretary, Director of Strategic Resources. In recent times, the moderator has invited emerging female leaders of the church to be standing associated participants.

Governing documents

Paragraph 36 of The Uniting Church in Australia Constitution states that the Synod shall appoint from among its members a Standing Committee which shall be empowered to act on behalf of the Synod between meetings of the Synod in respect of any of the responsibilities of the Synod except such as the Synod may determine.

Regulation 3.7.4.1(d) reiterates this by stating that the Standing Committee is empowered to act on behalf of the Synod between meetings of the Synod in respect of any of the responsibilities of the Synod except such as the Synod may determine.

The Queensland Synod by-laws give the SSC various powers and responsibilities, and at its core the committee is a decision-making body of the Synod.

The SSC currently meets monthly, excluding January, for between four and six hours. The SSC currently comprises up to 19 members: 10 elected members and up to nine ex officio members.

Regulation 3.7.4.1(a)(i) stipulates that the ex officio members of SSC are the Moderator, ex-Moderator, Moderator-elect and Secretary of the Synod, with any other ex officio members to be determined by Synod (Regulation 3.7.4.1(a)(ii)). Regulation 3.7.4.1(a)(iii) also states that the Synod shall elect any other members of SSC.

A summary of the proposal

The SSC considers that it is timely to revisit the model of the SSC to align it with best practice in effective governance. The proposition is based on the argument that a smaller SSC that continues to meet monthly in person would contribute to a more robust way of meeting. The quality of the decision-making is not seen to diminish by the size of the meeting, rather by the nature and accuracy of the information it receives.

The effect of these propositions would be that the SSC size would ordinarily be 12 voting members, with the potential for 14 if the Moderator used the discretion to appoint a further 2 ex-officio members. The Synod Standing Committee resolved to put this proposal to the Synod by agreement.

The SSC is the core governance body of the church in Queensland and is expected to hold itself across the complexity of the church, external regulations and community expectations. The SSC regularly receives information and makes decisions around the large and complex life of the church across Queensland. It manages the risk of adverse events as they occur and spends time overseeing the strategic mission of the church. It receives reports and oversees the functions of the Finance, Investment and Property Board, the Audit and Risk Committee and the Remuneration and Nomination

Committee as well as overseeing the activities of various Boards, Committees and Commissions and the activities of the Synod office.

As a result, it is expected that the SSC oversee the activities of the whole church in a skilful manner. They need to be supported in their agility to make big decisions in relatively short timeframes. The current contemporary and well researched position is that a smaller body with a diversity of thinking is the best way for key governance bodies of this type to operate.

Rationale

Finding the right size

While SSC meetings are a gathering as witnesses to Christ, they have a lot of operating business to transact. This includes approving Synod-wide policies, agreeing to major contractual or program commitments and overseeing the risk and strategic direction of the entirety of Synod activities.

The SSC aims to be as effective as possible in fulfilling its duties. Whilst there is no perfect size for any governing body, the size should be such that the requirements of the church can be met – yet not so large as to be unwieldy.

Contemporary governance best practice indicates that the size of a governing body would be between eight and 12 members. This is significantly smaller than the current size of the SSC. However, this expectation assumes a standard corporate entity of a group of members, a board, and a body of staff.

It is considered that the proposed model reflects good governance practice balanced with the practices of the church. A smaller SSC aligns with contemporary governance practice and shifts SSC membership from a more representative model to a skills-based model. In addition, the proposal ensures that at least half of the members are elected by the Synod in Session. The lay: ministerial member requirement for the SSC overall would remain per clause 36 of the Constitution and Regulation 3.7.4.1(b).

The proposal reduces the number of ex-officio members on the SSC to be:

- Moderator
- General Secretary
- ex-Moderator (for 12 months after the term of their office expires)
- Moderator-elect
- UnitingCare chairperson
- Wesley Mission Queensland chairperson.

Consultation on this proposal

In June 2018 a consultation paper was circulated on Queensland Synod Governance Structures, inviting comment on a number of governance areas within the Synod, including the best way for the SSC to meet. The paper was circulated broadly with several reminders issued via Uniting News.

The consultation paper proposed three options:

1. Expand the size of the SSC so that it includes representation from all the significant councils and entities from across the life of the church: presbyteries, UnitingCare Queensland, Wesley Mission

Queensland, Schools and Residential Colleges Commission, Board for Christian Formation and lay and ordained members. This body would meet quarterly and would focus on strategic planning and direction, risk management and compliance, monitoring performance and outcomes, policy setting, and communication and feedback across the whole of the church in Queensland. From it, six to eight people would be appointed to form an executive which would meet monthly. The SSC would determine the delegated power to the executive and monitor the executive's use of those delegations.

2. Decrease the size of the SSC and continue to meet monthly in person. This would contribute to what is considered a more robust way of meeting. The quality of the decision-making is not seen to diminish by the size of the meeting, rather by the nature and accuracy of the information it receives.

3. Maintain the status quo and redesign the nature of the business the SSC is expected to consider. Delegate decision-making across a range of operational matters to other committees and commissions of the church.

Following the consultation process, there was strong support for Option 2: decreasing the size of the SSC but maintaining monthly meetings.

Finding the right skills mix

Effective boards and committees need an appropriate mix of skills, attributes and perspectives to enable them to meet their stated remit and be high performing. Effective boards and committees exhibit diversity in terms of skill, attributes and perspectives, the focus of which is diversity of thought.

The proposition that the Moderator have the power to nominate up to 2 additional ex-officio voting members to the SSC based on specialist skills / circumstances at any point would enable the Moderator to make targeted appointments based on the needs of the day.

In July 2018 the SSC approved a skills matrix which was aimed at strengthening governance capacity by identifying specific skills, attributes and perspectives which should be present in the current and future membership of each identified church governing body.

The common skills, attributes and perspectives for all Synod governing bodies are:

Mandatory general governance skills: expected of all Synod governing body members

1. Theological understanding
2. Corporate governance understanding and commitment
3. Financial literacy
4. Strategic thinking
5. Critical reflection
6. Communication skills

Specialist skills: Synod governing body members should have a complementary mix of these areas

1. Specific and relevant industry knowledge, including Uniting Church ethos and polity
2. Board experience
3. Theological expertise
4. Risk management
5. Financial expertise
6. Legal expertise

7. Strategic planning
8. Property expertise
9. Education knowledge and expertise

Attributes and attitudes: expected of all Synod governing body members

1. Ability and experience to reflect theologically
2. Capacity to devote necessary time
3. Commitment to ongoing personal / professional development

Specialist perspectives: Synod governing body members should have a complementary mix of these perspectives

1. First Peoples
2. Multi-cultural
3. Youth and young adults
4. Regional and remote
5. Business / enterprise experience independent from the church

Limiting the term of the ex-Moderator

It is proposed that it is appropriate to limit the term of the ex-Moderator on the SSC to 12 months after the term of their office expires. It is proposed that the transition time from one Moderator to the next can be effectively managed in a 12-month period.

If this proposition is agreed by the 34th Synod, either an Assembly exemption from Regulation 3.7.4.1(a) regarding the ex-Moderator's position on the SSC or a presidential ruling regarding limiting the term of the ex-Moderator on the SSC (clause 36 of the Constitution) will be sought.

As a transitional strategy the Moderator-elect appointed at the 34th Synod would serve on the SSC for an 18 month term until the 35th Synod, with Moderator-elects thereafter serving for a 12 month term.

Limiting the number of ex-officio appointments

Whilst the chairs of the Finance, Investment and Property Board, Board for Christian Formation and the Remuneration and Nomination Committee would be removed as ex-officio members, they would continue to be engaged in the SSC via their respective regular reporting obligations.

The charters for these governing bodies require meeting minutes or regular reporting to be provided to the SSC.

Three-year terms with staggered / rotational appointments

3 year terms of appointment are normal for all other Synod governing bodies and are regarded as an appropriate minimum term for persons who are appointed to significant governance roles. The current requirements of the Regulations preclude the primary governance body of the Synod (between meetings of the Synod) from adopting this practice.

The SSC considers that the significant amount of complex business that needs to be transacted by it means that the need for continuity of membership beyond 'one cycle of a Synod meeting' is crucial.

Regulation 3.7.4.1(a)(iii) states that SSC members are elected until the next ordinary meeting of the Synod, so it is proposed that an exemption from this regulation be sought from the Assembly Standing Committee. Subject to the exemption being received, the Queensland Synod by-laws would be redrafted to allow elected members to serve on the SSC for a period of three ordinary meetings of the Synod subject to the person remaining a member of the ordinary meetings of the Synod for that whole period. This would also be subject to the 34th Synod approving the move to annual Synod in Session meetings.

If this proposition is approved, as a transitional arrangement, members elected at the 35th Synod would be appointed for varying nominal terms to allow a transition to staggered / rotational appointments.

Proposers

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