



**AUSTRALIAN
ASSOCIATION
OF FORMER
INTERNATIONAL
CIVIL SERVANTS
(AAFICS)**



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NEWSLETTER

JULY 2026

AAFICS represents retired officials from the United Nations and its agencies and funds. Former officials of other international organizations are also welcome to become members. We offer a link to UN retirees through occasional social events, as well as contacts for information and advice about retirement in Australia. We are affiliated to FAFICS in Geneva, the Federation of 64 Associations similar to ours and an essential source of advice on pension-related issues and on after-service-health insurance schemes. This newsletter has been prepared and circulated on a voluntary basis by the AAFICS membership

As we go to press with this winter edition of the *AAFICS Newsletter*, we continue to be confronted by war and violence across multiple parts of the globe. The invasion of Ukraine by Russia has resulted in a massive war of attrition that has lasted over 5 years. The human toll in death and injuries on the frontlines is appalling, while the overall misery caused to civilians



by the fighting has been hugely destructive. Meanwhile, thousands of kilometers away, television footage from Gaza shows wreckage caused through bombardments by Israeli forces. Amongst this calamitous situation, Palestinian men, women and children seek to eke out a daily life. Now, in an even more dramatic military operation in the region, the USA and Israel have combined to attack Iran, another war that has brought about a huge number of deaths and enormous infrastructural damage.

Amongst our AAFICS membership we have many personnel who have served in peace-keeping operations, such as the courageous men and women of UNIFIL, the UN Interim Force in Lebanon established in 1978 and designed to provide a neutral buffer in the zones to the north of Israel and in the south of Lebanon. Recently, several UNIFIL peace-keepers have been killed in military raids from Israel as they stood guard for peace.

Sadly, the UN seems powerless in all of these events as it is marginalised by major players with their own political agendas. As former UN staff members, perhaps it is our task to continue to play a more active role in promoting the UN and its commitments to global peace. - **Editor**

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AAFICS PRESIDENT'S REPORT

AAFICS Membership

We have 263 members, spread through our fair land as follows:

New South Wales	77
Victoria	68
Queensland	51
Western Australia	23
Australian Capital Territory	23
South Australia	14
Tasmania	7
TOTAL:	263

At least this is the number used when we paid our annual registration fees – US\$2 per member - to our parent organisation FAFICS, the Federation of Associations of Former International Civil Servants earlier this year.

Being a member of AAFICS is a bit like Hotel California, as I found out when I tried to do an audit of the NSW membership earlier this year.

Just pay the once-off membership fee and you are on the list, but we are not always advised when a member has passed and should be taken off the list.

The audit I tried to do of NSW members earlier this year was hampered by a lack of up-to-date contact details for some members.

Pension Fund chase-up

Each year, AAFICS is asked to follow-up on Australian based retirees who have not completed the *proof-of-life*, either the Digital Certificate of Entitlement or the paper Certificate of Entitlement.

This is a goodwill exercise as, generally, few of these retirees are members of AAFICS.

That was, again, the case this year when we were asked to follow-up on 12 retirees, whose pensions were listed for suspension. Only two of the twelve are members of AAFICS.

Through the good efforts of our State Coordinators (and former President Jennifer Ashton), we were able to track down 10 of the 12 and advise the Pension Fund that they are still alive.

Well done to you all.

Keep the Pension Fund informed of your contact details

The exercise chasing up those retirees whose pensions were listed for suspension showed that some retirees do not have complete contact details registered with the Pension Fund.

Either addresses were not complete, or there was no phone number or, for some, both were incomplete.

Can I suggest that you have a look at your profile in your Pension Fund Account to make sure that it is up-to-date?

2026 FAFICS Council

The 2026 FAFICS Council will be held in Vienna from 20 – 24 July.

If anyone is interested in going, please contact me and I will arrange for your registration.

The Council meeting addresses a range of topics of interest to retirees, including the Pension Fund and ASHI (After Service Health Insurance).

And Vienna is an interesting city to visit.

Surviving Spouse benefit

Following on from the comments on making sure that your contact details are up to date with the Pension Fund, there are benefits for those with a spouse to make preparations for the situation where they pre-decease their spouse, in order that their surviving spouse receives the surviving spouse benefit.

I am indebted to former President Jennifer Ashton for the following summary advice she gave to a fellow member.

Usually, the surviving spouse gets a pension that is about half of what the pensioner is currently receiving. www.unjspf.org/for-clients/survivors-benefit/

There is extensive information on the UNJSPF website. including a downloadable booklet on what they call "surviving spouse". www.unjspf.org/for-clients/death/

On the death of the pensioner, the surviving spouse must send the UNJSPF a death notification. unjspf-deathrelated@un.org

After receiving the notification, the Fund will stop the payments to the retiree and check if any overpayment needs to be reimbursed to/recovered by the Fund. For example, if a retiree passes away in January, but the notification is only sent to the Fund in March, the February and March payments will have to be reimbursed to the Fund.

If survivor's benefits are payable, the Fund will request the following documents to process such benefits: (note that there are some other documents listed that did not seem relevant so they have not listed here)

- Death certificate of the retiree;
- Copy of birth certificate for the surviving spouse;
- Copy of marriage certificate;
- Original and authenticated Payment Instructions (form Pens.E/2) from each survivor claiming a benefit;
- Copy of an official identification document bearing the surviving spouse's signature (such as a passport, driver's license, national identity card).
- A copy of a recent bank statement matching the survivor's name and the account details provided in the payment instructions form.

Jennifer wisely suggested to our fellow member that he gather together all these documents now, so that his wife could send them immediately to UNJSPF upon his death and so expedite processing of her payments. She also suggested that it probably would be wise for him to also send the available documents now to UNJSPF.

Good advice for us all and many thanks to you Jennifer.

With greetings to all AAFICS members.

**Maurice Critchley,
President, AAFICS**

COOEE!

REPORTS FROM BRANCHES



VICTORIA

The fourth consecutive annual AAFICS AGM/Social meeting was held at the Kathleen Syme Centre in North Melbourne on Saturday 14 March 2026. We were pleased to have the President AAFICS Maurice Critchley attend/officiate courtesy of a Teams link from NSW. We were encouraged to have one person new to AAFICS/Vic attend. We were saddened to acknowledge the passing of one long-term AAFICS/Vic regular. We benefitted from the

support of other AAFICS/Vic regulars with their wealth of background experience/knowledge. We were stimulated by the formal session which ran through two hours.

In a carry-over from the 2025 meeting, we covered an appreciation of Martin Hadlow (outgoing President AAFICS), the WhatsApp network (slowly gathering momentum into a third year), value/AAFICS newsletter, selected issues concerning FAFICS, UNJSPF and on-going challenges/opportunities of AAFICS membership in-country; capturing ex-UN people returning home and compliance/understanding of existing ATO tax requirements. Replacement of the AAFICS/Vic State Coordinators remains unresolved.

In summary – we had 15 people attend contributing to a stimulating exchange around the table. This included separate presentations/discussions re-WhatsApp, taxation/pensions definitions/options, personal experience/UNJSPF and the digital CoE.

The meeting concluded with an enjoyable coffee/brioche at the Coffee Shop in the KS Centre. It had been an interesting and highly rewarding meeting.



Members standing from left to right:

John Langmore, Ian Howie, Pushpa Jayakody Tony Marjoram, Coni Hicks, John Elfick Tomoko Marjoram, Mike Patto, Doris Elfick, Gregory Jones, Peter Steele, Ivy Steele, Madhavi Ashok, Robert Ashok. (Missing: Tara Strong – behind the camera.)

1. Officiating and Attending

Ivy & Peter Steele outgoing AAFICS/Vic State Coordinators officiated at the meeting. Formalities, however, were shared with Maurice Critchley, President AAFICS, courtesy of a Teams link. Mike Patto the previous Victoria State Coordinator was also in attendance.

2. AAFICS/Vic Community & AGM/Social Meeting

There are estimated >100 people in the AAFICS/Vic community – 68 ex-UN retirees and the remainder spouses/partners. Invitations were sent to everyone with an e-mail address. Fifteen people attended – representing retirees and partners, with 20 people offering apologies for not being able to attend. Two thirds of the AAFICS state community did not respond to the invitation.

The numbers of people attending and apologising for not being available were much the same as the previous three meetings held during 2023, 2024 & 2025. Many of the same people attended this year. Further information of those attending is contained in Annex 1.

For the fourth year in succession the meeting was held in the Kathleen Syme (KS) Centre* in Carlton, Melbourne. The venue is located in the central north city and easily accessible by public and private transport. Full use was made of in-house e-networking facilities that enabled the President AAFICS to introduce himself to the group and to share feedback relating to both national AAFICS networks and those that link the group to selected UN agencies – UNJSPF and FAFICS. The exchange across the table/distance worked well.

Where we did miss out was with the one-on-one social dialogue away from the table. Constraints of personal time precluded us taking advantage of the comfortable (and mainly empty) Common Room next door as in previous years. That said, a handful of people used the tea/coffee/fridge facilities in the Common Room before and after the formal meeting around the table. We had booked the room for a period of four hours, with the formal table exchange taking half the period. The meeting concluded with a small group of people well-known one-to-the-other sharing an ad hoc table at the Wild Timor Coffee Shop – outside the KS Centre.

During early planning, it was suggested that the meeting embrace a hybrid format – with distant AAFICS people invited to attend electronically. This was not adopted given the lack of experience with the facilities/equipment provided at the KS Centre, the disrupted nature of the venue when focusing between distant people and those within the room and, equally, the lack of spontaneity that can sometimes result. Instead, it was suggested that a separate follow-on ‘Zoom/Teams’ meeting be held to provide an opportunity for others to attend. What support exists in the wider state community for a meeting of this kind? It was agreed that the opportunity be explored and, if sufficient interest exists, then the meeting be implemented.

There is always considerable pleasure when meeting AAFICS people in person - being able to put faces/voices to the images of both newcomers and people already known. During the tenure of the present AAFICS state coordinators of-the-order 40 people have been met. The community is generally not in regular contact one-with-the-other.

*Available at: <https://www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/community/hubs-bookable-spaces/kathleen-syme-library-and-community-centre/Pages/book-a-space-kathleen-syme.aspx>

3. Issues arising from the AAFICS AGM/Social Meeting 05 April 2025
Itemizing the points/discussion/outcome from the minutes of the previous meeting 05 April 2025.

3.1 AAFICS Coordinating Volunteers

The national AAFICS network is dependent upon the handful of people who volunteer to act as service nodes – creating, receiving and/or transmitting the flow of information that helps maintain the cohesion of the majority. The viability of the national AAFICS network depends, perhaps, upon 10-12 regular active volunteers – state coordinators and core executives. Others may be requested to volunteer, for example, when the potential of a publication is recognised and/or when external representation is required.

Experience suggests the general reluctance of AAFICS people to become involved. Shifting from the current system of depending on the ‘few’ to one in which there are ‘many’ volunteers available would help bring people recently retired and those with more up-to-date UN experience of current networks/protocols/people – into the national AAFICS techno-management group.

A recent shift of tenure of one year for the President AAFICS recognized the reality of commitment that people are likely to make. The same is practical for State Coordinators. As-of-01 January 2026, Victoria no longer has an AAFICS State Coordinator. The current incumbents Peter & Ivy Steele gave notice for 31 December 2025 at the AAFICS/Vic

AGM/Social Meeting 12 months ago. Efforts to find a replacement meantime have not yet been successful notwithstanding successive approaches made to the AAFICS/Vic community. Two people requested more information, but this has not so far resulted in a replacement.

3.2 AAFICS Publications

No new publications have been produced by AAFICS/Vic within the past 12 months. A number of earlier documents, letters, reports, newsletters and similar are listed on the FAFICS website*. Earlier recommendations for action to re-consider/re-drafting the contents of the two AAFICS publications prepared by AAFICS/Vic >5 years ago have not been followed through**. Neither have copies been re-distributed to AAFICS/Vic people. There remains the uncertainty of whether or not AAFICS/Vic people may be fully aware of these documents. As reported previously the 'Demise' document is listed***, but not the 'Essential Checklist/Ex-UN Retirees/returning/Australia'. The AAFICS/Vic 2025 meeting had earlier recommended that the 'Demise' document be updated. This recommendation was reconfirmed.

The modus operandi for initiating new documents or updating existing documents remains uncertain. Previously, ad hoc 'committees' of people familiar with the topic were established. An approach of this kind may be an obvious first step. How to make a new start? How to prioritise sectors? Who are the people who may become involved? How to encourage them? The 'Demise' document, for example, is sufficiently recent enough that the original team of people who drafted it may still be available.

What is happening elsewhere within the national AAFICS network? What opportunities exist for exploring new documents together with others within the resources of the national AAFICS network?

*Available at: <https://fafics.org/associations/aafics-australia/>

**1. 'Essential checklist for ex-UN Retirees returning to Australia' and 2. 'Before your demise – personal information for families'.

***Available at: <https://fafics.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/AAFICS-Australia.pdf>

3.3 AAFICS/Vic WhatsApp Network

The AAFICS/Vic WhatsApp group recommended two years ago is now available/operational but remains under-used. More than a dozen people are registered. Everyone interested within the AAFICS/Vic network is invited to join. A key issue is one of personal privacy. Make direct contact with the Coordinator Pushpa Jayabody* for further information.

WhatsApp is there to be used ... reach out ... therein is the basis of neighbourhood/regional social groups – talk, coffee, lunch?

* Available at: pushpajayabody73@gmail.com.

3.4 AAFICS & UN Association of Australia*

AAFICS people represent those who have previously worked within the UN Family of agencies, programs, etc. The UNAA is there to promote, inform and explore opportunities for those aspiring to know more – the younger generation who may follow AAFICS people - to encourage/help them to become part of the UN Family. There is a deal of overlap and compatibility one-to-the-other. For those unfamiliar with the UNAA there is a regular newsletter available.

*More information at: <https://www.unaa.org.au>

3.5 Communications – AAFICS Newsletter & Others – Contributions & Representation

Published twice annually in July & December, the newsletter is the ultimate network contact for the majority AAFICS/Vic community (and AAFICS countrywide). Value is proportional to the extent of the publishable material supplied by the network ... people providing the Editor with the appropriate material*.

AAFICS Newsletters are archived by the National Library of Australia thus providing an historical record for the future. The newsletters are also available on the FAFICS website thereby sharing our activities/people/etc. with ex-UN people worldwide.

Many AAFICS people continue to link into the original UN agency/program for which they once worked courtesy of the dedicated newsletters available**. The UN newsletters provide a measure of continuity with a professional life that once was ... keeping people up-to-date. Other people may also find them of general interest.

*The Editor is available at: aaficsnewsletter@yahoo.com

**Example FAO available at:

https://newsletters.fao.org/k/Fao/register_for_fao_publications_update

Example UNEP available at: <https://www.unep.org/publications-data>

3.6. Communications within AAFICS/Vic

A handful of people within AAFICS/Vic do not have an email address. How to include them within the AAFICS network? There was limited practical follow-through with new/novel ideas of what to do. Mailing is an obvious choice, but it has not been followed in recent times. It is much the same with AAFICS publications. How do poorly connected people gain access to material that is mainly delivered in electronic form? Will they, for example, accept the costs of photocopying and postage?

The original registry of AAFICS/Vic people is now four years old. It contains the names of ex-UN people and spouses, agency and address, phone and email information. It is updated as ad hoc/casual information becomes available – people arriving/departing, changing status, addresses, etc. Eighteen months ago, a request was made to the community to update their personal information. This included a request for access to a next-of-kin/trusted friend who is not a partner. A response of 15% resulted. A second request should be circulated.

3.7 Challenges for AAFICS people into the next period

The eight inter-related challenges listed a year ago were re-introduced again this year. They concern the issues/viability/development/opportunities for the national AAFICS network of ex-UN people into the next period.

1. Unfavourable/unfair taxation of UN pensions.
2. Boosting AAFICS membership.
3. Raising the profile of AAFICS nationally.
4. How to identify Australians currently working with the UN Agencies/Programs?
5. How to identify Australians retiring and returning to Australia?
6. How to circulate AAFICS material/information to the UN Agencies?
7. Potential for e-networking/Zoom/Teams connecting key AAFICS people – as required?
8. How to keep/support non-tech/non-connected AAFICS people – as required?

Some of the challenges involved were raised in passing, but issues of time/interest/new information/resource people largely precluded further discussion. Selected challenges may provide a basis for encouraging novel/new initiatives/publications.

4. Reporting/Issues/Opportunities arising during the period 2025/26

Relating to the current meeting - presentations, reporting, Q&As and round table discussion some of which included the AAFICS President.

4.1 UNJSPF/'Fund'

The AAFICS/Vic community continues to rely mainly upon the AAFICS President and contacts/feedback/experience of AAFICS Management with the Fund. The meeting

considered this within five inter-related sectors: 1. Overview. 2. Financial performance. 3. Communications. 4. Certificate of Entitlement. 5. Experience AAFICS/Vic people.

1. Overview UNJSPF There is little information circulating ex-AAFICS to help keep people in contact with what may be happening with the Fund – inevitably this impacts both the community and the individual. Where to find information of this kind? Who is responsible for keeping AAFICS people informed? You! The Fund is available courtesy of their website*.

Check it regularly.

*Available at: <https://www.unjspf.org/>

2. Financial Performance UNJSPF* As a defined benefit pension plan, the Fund is designed for long-term stability within asset classes. It is designed to withstand short-term market volatilities which do not impact the final pension amount received by beneficiaries. As-of-late 31Dec25 the investment portfolio was valued at US\$107.4B and divided between global equities, fixed income and real assets/alternatives. Responsibility for the funds and investment of the UNJSPF is vested in the Representative of the UN Secretary General with oversight for administration the responsibility the UNJSPF Pension Board.

*https://www.unjspf.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/Website-PDF-Report_December-2025-combined.pdf



Members in discussion around the table.

3. Communications As part of the approval of the budget of the Pension Fund on 31Dec25, the UN General Assembly requested the Fund to undertake a review of the entire pension scheme. The ToR for the review are currently being established, with the results of the review required by 2028. In the background there is reference to comparisons made by some UN Member States between UN compensation packages and others - of the need to reduce costs and similar issues that may appear to place existing systems of remuneration at risk. Reporting continues with firm support for continuity of existing pension rights, but the likelihood of changes arising for new ex-UN beneficiaries*.

As always the AAFICS/Vic community may stand to gain a better understanding of the Fund and their respective pension rights as the result of the investigations/searches/experience of different people who regularly make the effort to explore/search the material available. The meeting requested these people to share their findings within the AAFICS/Vic network.

*More information is available at: <https://fafics.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/FAFICS-Presidents-Letter-re-GA-Resolution-Jan-2026-Final.pdf>

4. Certificate of Entitlement (CoE) There was passing reference to the importance of ensuring that all AAFICS/Vic beneficiaries return their CoE to the Fund before the end of the year – by completing/returning it in timely manner. Worldwide >50% of beneficiaries currently make use of the digital CoE. Ad hoc discussions around the table suggested that the AAFICS/Vic community have a similar uptake. Some people, however, pointed out the paucity of electronic services in selected out-lying rural areas and the value of continuing with the paper/mail option.

5. Pension Receipt - Experience AAFICS/Vic following the death of the ex-UN beneficiary

There was no personal experience available 2025/26 to describe the time lag following the death of the ex-UN beneficiary in the family and the disruption that followed for continuity of the pension. The issue was raised, however, that people remember to prepare for contingencies of this kind – from the compatibility of local bank accounts/credit cards that have joint ownership to making immediate contact with the Fund (to inform them of the death - and know how to do this). Equally, people may require sufficient funds available to cover the period of disrupted/nonpayment that typically follows. Last year AAFICS/Vic people described seven months in one case and, in another, a period of two years!

The 'Demise' document prepared by AAFICS/Vic is particularly valuable. In part 2: 'Tasks for those surviving you' and part 3: 'Survivors benefits' it describes in easy-to-understand language all that may be required of the ex-UN retiree and spouse and, latterly, what is required of the survivor*.

*Available at: <https://fafics.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/AAFICS-Australia.pdf>

4.2 FAFICS

Keeping abreast of what FAFICS is doing? The AAFICS/Vic community continues to rely upon information contained in the report of the FAFICS annual meeting typically held mid-year. This is summarised in the report of the AAFICS President published in the AAFICS Newsletter in December each year. Attendance is usually distant/electronic but, occasionally, in person. This was the case for the FAFICS meeting scheduled for Vienna, Austria in July last year. Per diem expenses were paid and AAFICS enjoyed a personal representative.

The national AAFICS community was requested to pay the annual subscription to FAFICS of US\$2/person for 2026 by 31Mar26. Therein the value of keeping the national AAFICS lists up to date.

Checkout the regular news items/categories that are listed on the FAFICS website* including 'FAFICS @50' FAFICS is 50 years old! See what the group has planned into the next period.

*Information at: <https://fafics.org/2025/11/28/50-years-and-beyond-celebrating-fafics50/>

4.3 AAFICS People and Australian Tax Office (ATO)

Discussed briefly at the meeting and included in correspondence with AAFICS people who were unable to attend. Meeting the annual requirements for paying tax on the basis of the UN pension remains central to the obligations/well-being of the AAFICS community – individually and as a group. A considerable history of definitions/representation exists between AAFICS

and the ATO, some of which is listed in the publications available courtesy of the FAFICS/Australia webpages.

Selected people queried what options there may be for bringing the taxation status of AAFICS people in line with other similar ex-UN retiree groups worldwide wherein taxation is more equitable, for example, in the OECD countries.

There was a sense that AAFICS should approach this kind of exploratory investigation informally with the assistance, for example, of AAFICS people who are already familiar with earlier initiatives and/or others who may be familiar with the workings of the ATO. Therein the reality, however, that it may eventually require the support of selected political figures.

4.4 AAFICS/Vic People coming and going

The AAFICS/Vic community welcomed three people into the community and celebrated the passing of one long-term and much treasured member. We recognised the life, contribution and achievement of our ex-UN/WHO colleague Anoma Wijeyaratne. It was a privilege share in the farewell to her with family, friends and an AAFICS/Vic colleague at a Mata Bana ceremony at the Dhamma Sarana Temple in Keysborough in March 2025.

4.5 Future of the United Nations/Agencies in an Ageing World.

The cultural heritage, experience, resilience and cohesion of older people provide for the continuity of families/tribes/nations given their knowledge, values, traditions and resources*. Typically, older people are frequently not easily recognised/appreciated/accepted given the greater inter-connectivity of the modern world, the speed with which telecommunication systems continue to grow/dominate and, not least, the longevity of people who become isolated as a result of age.

Catch these people whilst they are willing/able to participate/share and they may be well-placed to address/share global challenges such as climate action, disasters/risks, technology/applications, inter-generational vision/solidarity, etc. Originally included in the program in 2025 and no less important a year later given that the UN has declared 2021-2030 the decade of 'Healthy Ageing'. That said, constraints of time prevented re-introduction and further debate during the meeting.

The United Nations can also be considered part of an 'Ageing World'. It was established in 1945 following the traumatic experience of WW2 with prime objectives of preventing future global conflict. In March 2026 the UN Security Council began formal proceedings to replace the incumbent and ninth Secretary General (SG) Antonio Guterres. The process is one of intense behind-the-scenes negotiations between the five permanent SC members and their allies. The new SG will take office on 01Jan27. Interestingly, and for the first time (with a real chance of success) there is significant pressure/support for a woman candidate.

Mentioned briefly in passing at the AAFICS/Vic meeting was the value of the independent New York-based and UN-focused newspaper 'PassBlue'**. Typically, each edition features a particular focus on some key issue for the time/period, together with separate diary/items that describe the day-to-day activities of the UN at work. It provides an easy-to-read/comfortable means of keeping up-to-date. The newspaper is gratis.

*Check-out the policy brief on 'Ageing' at the UNESCO website: <https://social.desa.un.org/publications/un-desa-policy-brief-gender-matters-in-an-ageing-world-the-case-for-gender-responsive>

**Subscribe to PassBlue at:

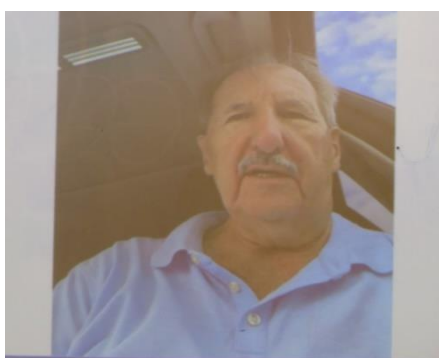
Annex 1. AAFICS/Vic People Attending the Social/General Meeting 14 March 2026

Table 1. AAFICS/Vic people attending the meeting

Name	Ex-UN Agency
Mike Patto	UNDP/UNDDSMS
Ian Howie	UNFPA
Tara Strong	FAO
Coni Hicks	FAO
Robert & Madhavi Ashok	UNICEF
Peter & Ivy Steele	FAO
John Langmore	ILO
Gregory Jones	ITU
Pushpa Jayakody	UNICEF
John & Doris Elfick	UNESCO
Tony & Tomoko Marjoram	UNESCO

Table 2. Apologies received

Name	Ex-UN Agency
Jacinthe D'Souza	UNICEF
Rupert MacLean	UNESCO
Sylvia Murphy	WHO
Colin & Meko Nathan	WHO
Susantha de Silva	WHO
Thangarajah Kugathanan	UNHCR
Michael Coughlan	WMO
Anne Klaric	UNHCR
Gladys Mutangadura	DPPA
Peter Budd	ICAO
Federico Marcon	ILO
Ian McDonald	WFP
Alastair Hicks	FAO
Christine Smith	ICAO
Chris de Bono	UNICEF
Nancy Wong Ali	UNESCO
Marie Scoullar	FAO
John Langmore	ILO
Honorine Nachia	UNICEF



AAFICS President Maurice Critchley courtesy of a Teams link from NSW sharing in the debate/discussions with state delegates at the meeting venue in Melbourne.

Note of thanks

The meeting particularly appreciated the practical/technical skills of Tara Strong & Tomoko Marjoram with handling the telecommunication facilities/network that linked the meeting with the AAFICS President, and for the photographic record made.

Peter & Ivy Steele, Victoria State Coordinators

[Editor's note: Many thanks Peter and Ivy for another outstanding report. Appreciated. Well done all Victoria members.]

QUEENSLAND

Our twice-annual social lunches always provide interesting opportunities to explore new restaurant locations and styles of cuisine.

With this in mind, in late March some 14 AAFICS Queensland members gathered at the Bellbowrie Tavern, a semi-rural location in Brisbane's south-west, for a most enjoyable social luncheon.



Apart from the attendance of a regular cohort of steadfast Queensland members, we also had the pleasure of welcoming two first-timers (Alfia and Nicholas) now based on the Sunshine Coast who recently joined the AAFICS group from their former service with the UN in Geneva. As always, the lunch event enabled members to share experiences, catch up with some of the current UN news, as well as discussing key matters of interest, such as pension and after-service health issues.



Ian holds the group in thrall.

The next lunch is planned for October and we will again seek an interesting restaurant in a location a little off-the-beaten-track or, at least, with an exotic and enticing menu, to bring Queensland members together.

Ian Douglas, Queensland State Coordinator

[Editor's note: Ian and Cathy are currently on an exciting travel adventure, traversing Australia in a caravan. Good luck on this 'bucket list' journey!]

IN MEMORIAM:

STEPHEN HILL AM

Wollongong-based Emeritus Professor Stephen Hill AM FRSN FTSE sadly passed away on the 7th March 2026.

Stephen had a long career with several universities, primarily the University of Wollongong, where he was Foundation Professor of Sociology in 1974. His academic interests also included chemistry and other science subject areas. Stephen wrote widely and was author of a number of books.



From 1995 to 2006, Stephen was Director of the UNESCO Regional Office for Science and Technology in Jakarta, Indonesia. Upon returning to Australia, he was active in AAFICS and, for a period, was NSW State Coordinator. He attended the most recent AAFICS meeting in Sydney last year and also had a contribution published in the December *AAFICS Newsletter*.

Stephen was 83 years of age. We express our condolences to family and friends.

UN AND AI



United Nations

UN Highlights Urgent Need to Protect Information Integrity

The United Nations' issue brief on information integrity highlights a growing global concern the erosion of trust in information in an increasingly digital world. At its core, information integrity refers to the accuracy, consistency and reliability of information, a standard that is now under significant threat from the rapid spread of misinformation, disinformation and hate speech.

While digital technologies have transformed communication for the better by connecting communities and amplifying diverse voices, they have also enabled false information to spread faster and wider than ever before. This has created a fragile information ecosystem where public trust is increasingly undermined, with serious consequences for democracy, human rights and social cohesion.

The United Nations warns that declining information integrity is not just a media issue, but a global challenge that affects peace, security and sustainable development. Disinformation can fuel conflict, deepen societal divisions and weaken confidence in institutions, while also hindering progress on critical global issues such as climate change and poverty reduction.

To address this, the UN calls for a coordinated, multi-stakeholder response. Governments, media organisations, technology platforms, civil society and individuals all have a role to play in safeguarding the information ecosystem. Central to this effort is the need to protect independent and pluralistic media, promote transparency, strengthen public awareness and ensure that digital platforms operate with greater accountability.

The brief also emphasises that solutions must balance the fight against harmful information with the protection of fundamental freedoms, particularly freedom of expression. Efforts to regulate content must not be misused to suppress dissent or restrict access to information.

Ultimately, the United Nations positions information integrity as a shared responsibility and a defining challenge of our time. Strengthening it will require global cooperation, ethical use of technology and a renewed commitment to truth, trust and transparency in the digital age.

Please click the link to view the full report – [Info Integrity Issue Brief 2 Final](#)

(From ABU News on-line)

NEWS FROM FAFICS

Our parent organization, the Federation of Associations of Former International Civil Servants (FAFICS) often provides us with links to interesting events, activities or presentations made

by the organization. The most recent was the call for candidates for the election of a new President and several Vice-President positions of FAFICS. Our President, Maurice Critchley, circulated this call to all AAFICS members.

Recently, FAFICS provided us with an interesting representation made by FAFICS to the UN GA on the subject of the entire UN Pension Scheme. It is available here: [FAFICS President's Letter re GA Resolution Jan 2026 Final \(1\).pdf](#)

Also, we received a link from FAFICS that might be of interest to some AAFICS members interested in a body to handle their personal financial affairs. We should note that we (AAFICS) have no knowledge of this body, nor its efficacy or otherwise. We simply inform you of a link provided by FAFICS. Please ensure that you carry out the appropriate checks before you consider this body. [AMFIE | Financial Cooperative Association Of International Civil Servants](#)

Should these links not open, please go to www.fafics.org for all details.

FILIPPO FLIES THE FLAG

Those AAFICS colleagues who worked for the UNHCR or knew its former High Commissioner, Filippo Grandi, will have been delighted to have seen Filippo as a flag carrier at the 2026 Milan Cortina Olympic Games.

While Milan is Filippo's home city, his links with the Olympic movement go much deeper and he was honoured by the IOC for his efforts to ensure the participation of refugees in international sporting events. Filippo retired from the UNHCR last year.



The Olympic flag is carried by Tadatoshi Akiba, second from right, Rebeca Andrade, Maryam Bukar Hassan, Nicolò Govoni, second from left, Filippo Grandi, Eliud Kipchoge, left, Cindy Ngamba, right, and Pita Taufatofua during the Olympic opening ceremony at the 2026 Winter Olympics, in Milan, Italy. | Photo: AP/Francisco Seco

PACIFIC NEWS

The Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) has called for urgent reform of the United Nations Security Council, warning the current structure “no longer adequately represents the broader membership” and must change to reflect global realities.

“For eighty years since the founding of the United Nations, the arrangement from a bygone era may have been necessary at that time, but it no longer adequately represents the broader membership of the United Nations today.”

“The world has changed significantly, and this evolution should be reflected in our representation,” said Universe Lawrence, FSM deputy UN Permanent representative at the 80th session of the UN General Assembly (UNGA) informal meeting on Security Council reform.

Aligning with the L.69 Group, Micronesia backed ongoing negotiations and welcomed Africa’s proposal, saying it “strongly supports the ongoing discussions on Security Council reform and warmly welcomes the African Union (AU) Committee of Ten’s submission of the African Model.”

Lawrence warned that current decision-making structures risk sidelining most countries and stressed the urgency of reform. “It is important that the voices of the majority are not overshadowed by the decisions of a few, and that the needs and perspectives of all members are taken into consideration.”

“It is therefore essential that we continue our efforts to reform the Security Council so that it better reflects the realities of today’s world and serves the interests of all member states,” she said.

Micronesia reiterated support for expanding the Council in both permanent and non-permanent categories to give developing countries and underrepresented regions a stronger voice.

“As an L.69 member, Micronesia supports the L.69’s blueprint of 27 seats (needing 15 affirmative votes) alongside Africa’s minimum of 26. This harmony ensures meaningful growth, fair representation for the Global South, vital for vast-ocean nations like ours, and a Council equipped to tackle the threats posed by climate change and sea-level rise with credibility.

“As my delegation has said in past statements, reform is not just a choice; it is necessary to make the Council more legitimate and effective,” she said.

The statement also backed Africa’s demand for greater representation, with Micronesia supporting “the Common African Position... for two permanent seats with all the rights and privileges of permanent membership.”

Lawrence linked the reform debate to climate threats facing small island states.

“The Security Council lacks legitimacy when regions suffering its decisions most, whether Africa’s crises or our drowning atolls from sea-level rise hold the least sway. For Micronesia’s low-lying communities, this gap threatens not just equity, but our physical existence,” she emphasised.

She also pushed for dedicated representation for Small Island Developing States (SIDS). “Micronesia fully supports giving SIDS a non-permanent seat, whose voices are often not heard in the Security Council.”

Highlighting climate risks, she said such representation is critical in addressing “SIDS’ acute exposure to climate-driven security risks that could submerge our homelands.”

“As a SIDS, Micronesia therefore champions the L.69’s proposal, rooted in CARICOM advocacy, for a rotating non-permanent seat reserved for Small Island Developing States. Far from rivaling Africa’s demands, it fills a critical void: addressing SIDS’ acute exposure to climate-driven security risks that could submerge our homelands” Lawrence said.

Micronesia urged further discussion on integrating this proposal, calling on African negotiators to consider the idea.

Lawrence also called for more structured negotiations. “I respectfully encourage the IGN to consider documenting each meeting in writing. Maintaining a single, updated text would enhance transparency, clarify positions, and support more focused discussions.”

She said this approach would help ensure reform stays on track, adding it would better equip the UN to respond to emerging global challenges.

(Pacific Islands News Association, PINA)

NEWS FROM/ABOUT MEMBERS

My Second Year Back “Home”

The year has gone so fast and a lot has happened. At Christmas my Swedish goddaughter and her family visited, and we recently returned the visit to her house in Nortaelje as part of our European trip that included Vienna (catching up with former colleagues) and Bristol (catching up with my daughter’s best friend and her family).

My collection of stories, flash fiction and essays, *Back Burning Redux*, was published in Brisbane by IPOZ and I had several pieces of flash fiction published in editions of [Pure Slush](#), Adelaide. I also had a couple of 100-word stories published in a local paper, *The Village Observer*, and I participated in a reading and talk at [Writers in the Pub](#), an event of Sydney Writers Inked. I’m looking forward to participating in another such event in October.

IPOZ is also publishing my book about my mother and her life in craft, entitled [Earthworms in the Rain](#).

I’m currently working on a revision of my PhD novel, *Ambergris*, so wish me luck with that task, which I hope will get me an agent.

That’s all for now. Keep healthy and curious.

Sylvia Petter, formerly ITU

[Editor’s note: many thanks, Sylvia. Best wishes for the success of your books.]



DESTRUCTION OF THE UN?

How to foster global lawlessness: Destroy the UN and its agencies

by Allan Behm

Here's a question that everyone should be asking as global rupture (to use Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney's word) spreads.

What's the best way to make the world more lawless, more chaotic and much more dangerous? The answer is stunningly simple. Defund the institutions responsible for managing the international rules-based order.

That's what's happening right now. And the saddest thing is that the country that has invested most in the institutions that have kept the global community on a more or less even keel for the past eighty years is the country that's hastening their demise. The UN system is currently on life support. Without an urgent cash transfusion by its debtors, principally the United States, the UN's chances of survival are slim.

At the end of January, the UN Secretary-General warned members that the organisation is at risk of "imminent financial collapse". At the end of 2025, the UN faced a debt overhang of more

than one and a half billion dollars. Its financial position is made even more precarious by an arcane budget rule that requires the UN to return to its members unspent funds that they haven't actually paid. That's right – the UN must repay money that it never actually spent or received.

The Secretary-General's warning comes in the wake of President Trump's sustained campaign of withdrawal from international organisations considered "wasteful, ineffective or harmful", starting in February 2025 with the UN Human Rights Council, UNESCO and the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees. Trump also announced that the US would not pay any arrears to these organisations.

In January this year, Trump followed up his earlier Executive Order with a Presidential Memorandum to US Department and Agency heads withdrawing the US from an additional 66 international organisations ranging from climate, ecological and environmental bureaux to various ECOSOC commissions. The US also withdrew from various other institutions, including those focused on anti-piracy, anti-terrorism and prevention of violence against children, along with institutes dealing with democracy, justice and the rule of law

In his press statement elaborating on Trump's memorandum, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio identified mismanagement, waste, ineffectiveness and direct harm to the interests of the US, along with threats to America's "sovereignty, freedoms and general prosperity". In terms reminiscent of the "running dogs" and "imperialist lackeys" of authoritarian communiques of fifty years ago, Rubio claimed that "from DEI mandates to 'gender equity' campaigns to climate orthodoxy, many international organizations now serve a globalist project rooted in the discredited fantasy of the 'End of History'."

If any of that is true, that it has been allowed to happen represents a startling failure in US multilateral diplomacy. Moreover, the hyped-up language and straw-men binaries that underpin Rubio's statement is the antithesis of the calm control and elegant elocution that has distinguished State Department diplomacy and American diplomats for generations. It is a grim commentary on the destruction of the prodigious talent that the State Department built up over the past eighty years.

So, what's to be done?

First, countries like Australia – the prosperous, stable and secure countries that account for over half of the global economy – need to advocate the critical role of the international rule of law in maintaining world peace and the critical place of the UN and its agencies in providing the institutional mechanisms through which the international rule of law operates. Surely the United States sees itself as such a country.

And if it does, the second thing like-minded countries need to do is to represent their concerns to the US through both political and official channels. Instead of tip-toeing around President Trump, the leaders of the democratic nations should emulate Prime Minister Carney in talking truth to power. Quite simply, President Trump is acting neither in his interests nor in the interests of the US.

Perhaps the third thing Prime Minister Albanese might consider, if he would like to host a high-level international visit that is demonstration and protest free, is to invite the UN Secretary General to undertake an official visit to Australia. That would permit the Albanese government to give at least symbolic effect to its oft-repeated words of support for the international rules-based order.

It would also provide the opportunity for Australia to promote the case for the expansion of the permanent membership of the UN Security Council to include nations from "the global south"

such as Brazil and India, as well as one or more of the economic engines of Asia, such as Indonesia, Japan and South Korea. And if the US wants to maximise the RoI on its UN dues, perhaps it might be persuaded to support relocation of some of the specialised agencies from Europe and North America to Africa, Asia and Latin America.

It is just amazing where a financial refloat of the UN and its agencies might take us.

Allan Behm is an advisor at the Australia Institute's International & Security Affairs program.

[Editor's note: sincere thanks to Kate Gordon, ACT for alerting us to this article.]

TELLING THE UNTOLD STORIES

Queensland AAFICS members get together over lunch twice each year and, as former Queensland State Coordinator, Mike Sackett, has insightfully observed, these luncheons are always great! In our day-to-day lives, we mix with people who have not had the international agency experiences that we have had. Yet in many cases, much of our lives - many of our stories - relate to these times. To talk too much of them can seem like we are just 'banging on' about our previous lives. However, in the surrounds of other AAFICS members, who have their own stories and understand, we can speak freely without anyone thinking we are big-noting ourselves.

I have certainly enjoyed the stories that come up at these lunches and in the *AAFICS Newsletter*. So, at the most recent Queensland lunch, I proposed that we could, for those who wished to participate, document some of these stories - to get them "on the record" and to share them more broadly. There seemed to be fairly strong support for the proposal.

The idea is that if stories are sent to me (aaficsbook@gmail.com), I will collate them and translate them into a multi-chapter book. This will be an e-book - in other words, in electronic form. I will edit the stories, but not to change their meaning, merely to prepare them for e-publication. I would hope that we can include a reasonable number of photos within the stories. If it is not possible to provide a written contribution, then I am prepared to receive a clear 'taped' contribution (perhaps as an MP3 file) and convert that to text.

From past experience, I have an idea that a short story is most likely read if it is 'short'. While no hard-and-fast rules apply, I think individual contributions might be best limited to perhaps 2500 words as a maximum.

What to write? Whatever you want to write but the following might form useful prompts:

- Where I was born and spent my formative years.
- What skills did I develop through my education and how did these prove useful in my international civil service (ICS) career.
- Did I benefit from any particular mentoring.
- How and where did I obtain my first ICC job.
- What was the nature of my work and in which countries did I work and live.
- What were my best experiences and is there any one experience that I am most satisfied with.
- How did I address language and cultural issues.

- What were my biggest challenges.
- Looking back, what elements 'saw me through' when times were difficult.
- Other

For the spouses/partners of ICCs, while many of the above apply, there is also a wealth of experience in moving countries, settling into life, making social contacts, managing families, surviving long absences and fears for my absent partner.

There is no deadline for this. I will merely add to the "book" as material is available. I will also have to work out how we can "post" the material to somewhere where AAFICS members can access it progressively. Any ideas are welcomed.

In terms of privacy, bear in mind that your stories will be shared. I imagine that, with your concurrence, we might also direct your stories to the newsletter from time to time, in part or as a whole.

Please do not feel pressured in this, but I am more than keen to read your unique histories and will do my best to include them for everyone's benefit.

Submissions should be made via email to: aaficsbook@gmail.com

Ian Douglas, formerly FAO



THE WAY WE WERE - 1987

In our December, 2025 *AAFICS Newsletter*, we published some pages from the original *AAFICS News* distributed in the 1980s.

We now move to the year 1987 when the key subject of the edition was, not unexpectedly, the UN pension. One concern related to taxation of the pension in Australia and the other discussed whether to stay on the US dollar track or move to the local track.

Enjoy reading the discussion on the following two pages. Again, we are most grateful to the late AAFICS President/Secretary/Treasurer/Editor at the time, John Hirshman.

Volume VII, Number 2
July 1987

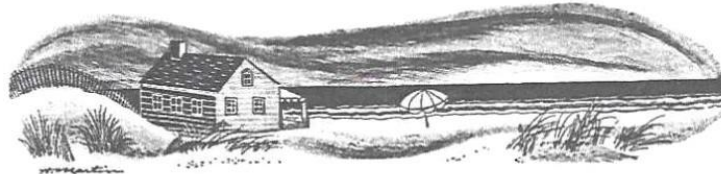
AAFICS NEWS

AUSTRALIAN ASSOCIATION OF FORMER INTERNATIONAL CIVIL SERVANTS (AAFICS)

PENSIONS : U.S. OR LOCAL TRACK?



At its meeting at the home of Cecil Showman at Darling Point on 17 May, AAFICS discussed a number of issues currently facing members, the major one, naturally, being pensions. On 1 April, the date when pensions are adjusted each year if the CPI has moved 3% or more, those members on the U.S. track found this year that they were receiving less money in April than they had received the previous month. This, of course, was owing to a decrease in the rate of exchange and not in pension. However, there was not an increase in pension either because the U.S. CPI had not risen to 3%. Those on the local track did receive an increase in pension, but their rate of exchange is stymied by the General Assembly's 120% cap. Those members on the U.S. track wanting to change back to the local track are given only one opportunity by the Pension Fund to do so. At the moment, the meeting decided, it is to the Australian member's advantage not to change back, but that the future movements in the CPIs and the rates of exchange will be closely followed and information at that time will be furnished accordingly. The United Nations Joint Staff Pension Fund pension adjustment system (JSPB/G.12, 1 January 1985) is complicated and difficult to follow for the layman, but AAFICS News has reproduced it in this issue anyway for the information of members (see pp. 6 - 12).



ANNUAL REPORT

The year went quickly and fairly quietly for us with little in the way of pension payment problems on the whole. We acquired a number of new members. Pension payments went up and then down again largely in response to Australian dollar fluctuations. Most of our pensionable members opted for the U.S. dollar track when the Pension Fund offered a choice again. That seems to have been the right decision.

On the social side, our year-end dinner in Sydney was again most pleasant, with the usual regret that it was only Sydney and that in other states the initiatives for social contact have to be left to local members.

We had pretty well given up on any positive action by the Taxation Commissioner on appeals against assessments on pensions. Out of the blue Dr. Harry Carroll received notice that the Taxation Commissioner had referred his case to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal. As members may know, the Taxation Review Boards have been abolished, with the Tribunal hearing appeal. After discussion it was agreed that we would support Harry Carroll and appear before the Tribunal. We would not, however, at this stage consider engaging legal representation but would see what emerged from the preliminary hearing.

Regarding pension payments, some members experienced delays in June, which were resolved; others protested about bank charges. The National Australia Bank and ANZ Bank since January this year have deducted \$5 each month from pensions. The Commonwealth Bank formerly charged \$3, but stopped after our protest; Westpac doesn't charge, at least at present. Pension transmissions from Bankers Trust, New York, for N.S.W. generally come through the Commonwealth Bank or Westpac. For Victoria, South Australia and Queensland, however, they come through the National Bank or ANZ. AAFICS has now written to the Pension Fund, New York, asking whether it is possible to route all transmissions through the Commonwealth Bank or Westpac. Members may wish to consider changing to non-charging bank branches in their area, but this alone would not help if the transmission from New York continues to come through banks that charge. Customers of these banks should complain about the charges which AAFICS considers unfair.

As previously stated, we were able to negotiate with AFICS (New York) that our members could join AFICS for \$A7 instead of \$US10. Transmission charges made the \$US10 even more expensive. I have sent the money on behalf of 10 members, some of whom have reversed previous resignations from AFICS (New York) as keeping up their membership is now simpler and cheaper. The arrangement works; I have received my AFICS (New York) membership card and AAFICS thanks the New York Treasurer, Mr. Jacques Lippetz, for the arrangement.

Bob Rowland, our previous representative on the executive of the United Nations Association of Australia (N.S.W. Branch) has resigned. I have nominated in his place. Lurline Price is also on the executive. We will try to help in whatever way we can.

My thanks again to all the office bearers and the interstate and N.S.W. members who have assisted and made suggestions for activities and improvements this year.



John HIRSHMAN

TREASURER'S REPORT

We have 87 members on our books now. Some 1987 membership fees are still outstanding, but we manage financially as we had no major outgoings this year.

We decided at our last Sydney meeting not to ask for any fee increase. This remains at \$5 a year. Some members have suggested an increase and have indeed made donations which are much appreciated, but we will not at present poll all our members whether they would support a fee increase. Should we have to incur legal fees for taxation issues, the position may change.

Our savings account with the National Australia Bank paid interest of \$65.91 on 30 April 1987. Our balance is \$922.52 plus \$40 in cash paid to Arthur Travis for production and mailing of this newsletter.

A UN CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF OLDER PERSONS

Update

In the last issue of the *AAFICS Newsletter* (December 2025), information was shared regarding global efforts towards the adoption by the United Nations of a binding Convention on the Rights of Older Persons. These initiatives resulted in the formation of the UN Intergovernmental Working Group (IGWG) in April 2025 by the UN Human Rights Council (Australia is currently a member). The Australian Government, supported by the Australian Human Rights Commission, backs the development of an international legally binding instrument.

In this issue an update is provided on progress since late 2025.

The IGWG met in Geneva on **18-20 February 2026**, officially transitioning the global push for a convention from years of debate into active formal drafting.

The main objective was to set up the organization and methodology for the production of a draft Convention, identifying who would be participating, what would be discussed, when and where meetings would be held.

Several panel discussions were held. However, they were not thematic in nature and consisted mainly of diverse statements from the selected panel members.

At the session 27 states and two state groups (the European Union and the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf) made statements. Australia was not among these. There were over 30 international, regional and national organizations and stakeholders in attendance.

The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) had called on civil society, NGOs and member states to make submissions to the IGWG so as to provide inputs on the framework, architecture, and guiding principles of the future legally binding instrument.

Of the 18 submissions to the IGWG in February 2026 there was one from Australia by the Community Legal Centres Australia (CLCA). It is a non-governmental organisation in Special Consultative status with the United Nations since 2003 and it is the peak body for the Australian community legal sector.

Interesting points in their submission include:

1. Calling on the IGWG to ensure the meaningful and continuous involvement of older persons and their representative organisations as central to achieving UN's commitment to inclusive, participatory and rights-based standard-setting. Further, the IGWG could consider promoting a decision encouraging member states to include older persons and their representatives in their delegations, to support their participation financially and technically in Geneva, and to consult organisations of older persons at national level ahead of each IGWG session.
2. The CLCA submission also called for the IGWG and the Australian Government to ensure that the IGWG hears the voices and views of Australia's older First

Nations people (and older First Nations peoples from other places) and their representative organisations as well as those of older persons and their organisations in the Pacific region given their limited engagement to date with the process towards the proposed UN Convention. Ensuring that the voices and views of older people living in rural and remote areas are heard was also highlighted.

You can read the text of the CLCA submission in the link below.

<https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/olderpersons/submissions/2026-02-meeting/subm-organisational-meeting-ig-writ-subm-rece-othe-stak-41-commun-clca-clca.docx>

In his closing remarks the chair of the IGWG, the Ambassador of Argentina , Mr. Carlos Mario Foradori, indicated that “as a next step, a formal process will open to receive written contributions from States on the framework and principles of such an instrument.” He stated that “this is how common purpose begins: by listening carefully enough to discover where our differences end and our shared responsibilities begin”. He went on the say that “I hope the seriousness, the imagination, and yes, even the courage of these contributions will help to produce a guiding document rooted firmly in international law, yet alive to the hopes of the countless individuals who have worked — patiently, stubbornly, sometimes quietly — to bring us to this moment.”

Unfortunately, no report with tangible outcomes was produced from this IGWG meeting. It appears that there is still much to do to move forward in identifying the precise methodology and substantive agenda of work of the IGWG. There are many non-governmental organizations at different levels around the globe lobbying for the rights of older persons to be enshrined in a UN convention and advocating for their organizations and representatives of older persons to be active participants. Not all member States, however, are enthusiastic about such inclusivity. UN Conventions often seem to have long gestation periods and while there has been more than a decade of debate and discussion about a UN Convention on the Rights of Older Persons, it appears there is still a way to go for a text of a draft Convention to be realised and finally adopted.

Panel discussions and statements of those present at the February 2026 IWGW session, as well as the text of the various submissions can be viewed at the following link.

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/events/meetings/2026/organisational-session-intergovernmental-working-group-human-rights-older>



Next steps

The first official working group session of the IWGW is scheduled to take place in Geneva on **13-16 July 2026**. **The original aim of this session was to** begin to debate the contents of a draft text of a UN convention on the rights of older persons. However, before this can proceed, the method and plan of work and agenda setting will need to be clarified and settled.

In **November 2026** a further meeting of the IWGW will be held.

Meanwhile, and in parallel, various stakeholder groups are holding sessions at the UN in New York, Vienna and Geneva and civil society organizations continue to lobby through various platforms.

During the 62nd session of the Human Rights Council a side event to be held on **23 June 2026** at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, was entitled

“The Human Rights Council at 20: Achievements and Opportunities in the Promotion and Protection of the Human Rights of Older Persons”. The aim of the event was to reflect on the Human Rights Council's achievements over the past twenty years and discuss the historic process currently underway to develop a UN convention on the rights of older persons. Online participation was available.

The UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) is supporting a high-level political forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) at the UN in New York from **7-15 July 2026**. The forum's theme is focusing on transformative, equitable and coordinated action for the 2030 SDG (Sustainable Development Goals) Agenda. The DESA and civil society organizations represented by the Stakeholder Group on Aging (SGA) are working to integrate older adults into the SDG agenda. More information about this forum can be found in the links below.

<https://mgos.org/2026/04/06/stakeholder-group-on-ageing-executive-summary-of-the-hlpf-2026-position-paper/>

<https://hlpf.un.org/2026>

Earlier in 2026 DESA published policy briefs related to aging issues, i.e.

[UN DESA Policy Brief No. 187: Revealing the Generational Economy: An Essential System at Risk](#) and [UN DESA Policy Brief No. 186: Gender Matters in an Ageing World: The Case for Gender-responsive Policies](#).

In summary, human rights groups and legal bodies (including the Australian Commission on Human Rights) are advocating for the new convention to clearly establish protection against:

1. Ageism and systemic age discrimination;
2. Violence, neglect, and financial/physical abuse;
3. Barriers to long-term and palliative care;
4. Denial of autonomy, independence, and access to justice.

In **early June 2026**, the Australian Human Rights Commission and Rights of Older Persons Australia (ROPA) will convene public briefings in Australia to discuss the latest international developments.

Linda Wirth, formerly ILO

[Editor's note: sincere thanks, Linda, for another outstanding report. We are hugely appreciative of your efforts and look forward to hearing more as the matter proceeds.]

STOP PRESS: TROUBLE AT ITU HQ

Dear retired colleagues,

As you may be aware, the ITU headquarters in Geneva sustained damage on Sunday, 14 June 2026, in the context of the G7 demonstrations.

Fortunately, no injuries were reported, and our operations continue without disruption.

Access to the ITU premises has been restricted to essential personnel only during the G7 Summit (Friday 12 June to Thursday, 18 June, inclusive).

As a precautionary measure to ensure your safety and well-being, retirees are kindly advised not to visit the ITU premises in Geneva during this period, until Thursday 18 June 2026, inclusive. Should you have any urgent needs during this period, do not hesitate to contact the Human Resources Management Department: Chief.HRMD@itu.int.

We thank you for your understanding.

Yours faithfully,

ITU Secretariat

[Editor's note: many thanks to Sylvia Petter for sharing this e-mail sent to all ITU retirees. The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) headquarters in Geneva suffered property damage during a massive anti-G7 demonstration. On June 14, 2026, a peaceful march involving around 20,000 protesters escalated as masked groups clashed with police, subsequently smashing windows at the ITU and other multinational offices in the city centre.]

A MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

Dear readers. Thank you to those who have contributed to this July 2026 edition of the *AAFICS*



Newsletter. This month, we have again gone back to *AAFICS* of the past to publish the front page of the *Newsletter* from July, 1987. Dr. John Hirshman, founder of *AAFICS* in 1980, was also *AAFICS* Treasurer and Editor of the *Newsletter* for most of his time in the role. His remarks in the 1987 edition are most interesting. Looking forward to receiving your contributions for the next *AAFICS Newsletter* edition later this year. Please send to me in MS Word (not as a PDF, nor in some strange word processing programme unique to your computer!) Standard defamation and other legal journalism content rules apply. Thank you.

FEATURE STORY:

APPRECIATING THE MAGIC OF WETLANDS – YOU AND YOUR PLACE IN THE SCHEME OF THINGS

Live in a benign well-established suburban neighbourhood and the chances are that you'll probably never give thought to the importance of wetlands as the basis of the development and well-being of our species – you, your people, your security of food/water supplies and shelter.

Each year the importance of natural wetlands is recognised internationally by the United Nations with the celebration of World Wetlands Day on 02 February. For 2026 the theme is 'Wetlands and traditional knowledge celebrating cultural heritage' wherein people are invited to explore the implicit and ancient heritage connections that evolved from early cultural practices, traditions and knowledge into the modern era.

Appreciate the value of wetlands

Wetlands worldwide currently cover an estimated 6% of the surface of the Earth and provide an ecological home to 40% of all plant and animal species. Wetlands are equally important for the well-being of people – helping to regulate climate, protect the living environment, providing flood control and purifying water. More than 1B people (12% world's population) depend upon wetlands for their livelihoods. However, rapid growth in global populations, lack of understanding and respect leading to over-exploitation/consumption linked to unsustainable technological development has increased risk of degradation and, ultimately, the loss of wetlands.

During the past 50 years estimated 35% of wetlands have been lost – draining land for agriculture, construction, over-exploitation of natural resources including marine life, invasive species and climate change. Wetlands are frequently seen as wastelands to be reclaimed for alternative use. It behoves local people and their communities to appreciate the potential for employment and income generation and, importantly, the quality of life to be gained by respecting them. Existing wetlands require protection.



Public Open Day venue with presentation kiosks provided/serviced by Melbourne Water and the Friends of Edithvale-Seaford Wetlands. Selection of native plants/grasses were available gratis to those attending.

Open Day Edithvale-Seaford Wetlands

Issues of this kind were covered in the introductory/preamble to the Open Day '*Celebrations of Wetlands*' held at the Edithvale Bird Hide 01Feb26. The venue was presented jointly by a friendly and well-informed team from Melbourne Water, Edithvale-Seaford Wetlands, Kingston City Council and Birdlife Australia.

Selected people from the team addressed the 50-100 people crowded into the small car park where there were a handful of information/entertainment/teaching kiosks that had been erected. Wander the kiosks, talk with the people, visit the Land for Wildlife building behind the car park and importantly, at set times in the program take advantage of the invitation to follow the Birdlife Australia guides into the wetlands to catch a glimpse of the native water birds in their natural setting. Our group of 30 or so stretched out on the walk but, if you wanted to catch the highly interesting descriptive feedback on-the-hoof as it were, you had to keep pace with the guides.



Our walk took us into the Edithvale North wetlands – cross Edithvale Road and on to the Long Beach Trail that follows the wire fence that encloses the wetlands on the one side and the elegant wide-open space of Edithvale Common with its line of mature trees on the other. The weather that morning was bright, warm and benign - it was gorgeous walking country. In the distance the alien images of the housing in Aspendale Gardens dominated – emphasizing the small area given over to the lagoons and its wildlife. The guide described the nature of the country that he remembered from >50 years ago – dairy cattle, milk production and endless wire fences – before the current wetlands were re-established.

As particular birds came into view everyone stopped and one or other of the guides provided focus for twitchers and newcomers alike by describing the different species, habits and migratory routes when re-emphasizing the importance of wetlands for aquatic birdlife*. A pair of binoculars helped sort the birds one-to-the-other and particularly when they were diving and bottom feeding.

There were two buildings to one side of the carpark and the kiosks erected for Open Day – a basic single-level bird hide at the end of a short boardwalk, and a two-story wooden building with name board and plaque commemorating the Edithvale-Seaford Wetlands 40 years ago. Both hide and building overlooked the lagoons of Edithvale South. Lack of rain during the autumn months had drained the lagoons. The building, however, was a treasure of wetlands and ornithological information – wall boards, tables, information posters and, equally, a handful of friendly and well-informed local people – Friends of the Edith-Seaford Wetlands. Want to know more? Explore the website available: www.edithvale-seaford-wetlands.org



Upper deck of the Land for Wildlife Building opened by the Minister of Conservation in 1986. Windows look out over the lagoons of Edithvale South Wetlands, which were completely devoid of water and birds at the time of the visit.

Cullum-Cullum Swamp

The Edithvale-Seaford Wetlands represent a remnant of the Cullum Cullum Swamp that 200 years ago – before colonial settlement - extended >50 km² behind the eastern coastline of St Philips Bay from Mordialloc to Frankston. The swamp had a catchment >700 km² across the peninsula.

The Bay including the eastern swamp and wetlands was once home to estimated 10,000-20,000 people before the colonial era – the Bunurong People. They were not a static population, as such, but one that moved with the availability of seasonal land and sea foods. Colonisation severely disrupted the ancient patterns of life. By early/mid-19th C. <2,000 people remained – people who subsequently became lost as the swamp was drained and the natural materials/resources – trees/timber, minerals, water resources and land – were commercially exploited for construction and farming.



The Cullum-Cullum swamp remained through to the late 19th C. when drainage channels were cut through to the coast to discharge surplus water into the Bay. Small areas of the original wetlands were left to protect the remaining land against flooding. Patterson River, Mordialloc Creek and Dandenong Creek date from those days.

And, therein, the paradox of wetlands in modern society and the international heritage theme promoted for 2026 – appreciating the value of wetlands and the original people who had once lived there through >50 millenniums. These people are no longer there. Similarly, only a remnant of the original swamplands remains – the rest has long since become lost to ‘development’. Modern people and their communities have replaced them but continue to benefit from the ecological/economic value of the land, sea and natural resources that remain. The same holds true for the native wildlife

– in the complexity and inter-related nature of biological resilience and dependable food chains, for example, that enable a handful of bird species to cover the world with their incredible migration routes.



Pied Cormorant perched overlooking the lagoon. Distinguished from the slightly smaller Black-Faced Cormorant by wide white sides encompassing the eye and with a narrow black strip along the back of the neck. The other bird is black around the eye.

**Wetlands are crucially important for selected migratory birds. The Bar-tailed Godwit (*Limosa lapponica*) wader for example flies to Alaska and back each year. That's 11 days non-stop flying >13,000 km one way! Fertile wetlands provide migratory birds with plentiful food and a place in which to build sufficient body mass/energy resources for their migratory flights. The Bar-tailed Godwit does not have webbed feet and cannot set down on the sea to rest.*

Peter Steele, formerly FAO

[Editor's note: thank you Peter and Ivy for all you achieve for AAFICS and for this, another most informative tale of your interesting life. Your thoughtful comments are appreciated by all.]



THE LAST WORD:

A VISIT TO THE DOCTOR IN MYANMAR

The doctor's room had, in its day, been the hallway of a well-to-do merchant's house and was about 12 feet wide by 30 feet long. Inside this, a cubicle had been made, perhaps 8 feet by 6 feet at most - this was the 'surgery' or examination room. It had walls, but no ceiling. In the main room, three plain wooden benches formed the seating arrangement for patients. From the examination cubicle all that was said inside was immediately available to the patients in the queue - even if one were not ill it was a good place to catch up on the problems of others and, some improvement on the local TV scene.

The external doorway was of an older era, painted a rusty brown and fixed open, at least during surgery hours. Through it wafted the evidence of a shortage of toilets in the street or, for the passers by, an olfactory and unpleasant testimony to the state of the drains, the sewers or simply to the prevailing winds. Sometimes it is difficult to say whether or not a breeze on a hot, humid day is a welcome thing.

Around the walls of the room were at least thirty pictures of the doctor and his family at varying stages of their lives. He in cap and gown in one and in traditional Burmese dress in another. As a handsome young man with a lovely young wife and, as a retired professor doctor with degrees in this and that from local and foreign universities or medical associations. It was an impressive array, a measure of the man's pride in his family and in his qualifications.

I was, I think, his second patient who was paying him, legally, in US dollars. He told me that between this other patient and myself he would have the \$50 minimum necessary to open a foreign currency account - from which the Government would immediately take 25% at the official exchange rate leaving him \$37.50. However, to gain another perspective, the doctor must be about 60 to 65 years old and for most of his life his official salary would have been, at that time, less than K3,000 per month. To put that in some form of perspective, a bag of cement cost K650 but a meal in a restaurant might cost K40 to K100. Now that he is retired from Government service and can set up private practice the doctor has a few years in which to gain some comforts of life.

Bearing in mind that one US\$ was officially worth about K6.7, but K180 on the alternate market.

Returning again to the surgery. High in one wall was an alcove containing a shrine to Buddha and to the left of that a large photograph of a statue of Buddha. This two years in Myanmar has been my first introduction to Buddhism and Buddhists and whilst it has many good sides, it seems little different from the other religions in some ways - although of course Buddhism is not a religion, rather it is a way of life or a philosophy. I see (on TV) all these people bowing down and seemingly worshipping withered old as well as younger monks in their brown robes. I see them giving presents and paying hundreds, thousands and millions of Kyats to build pagodas - for merit. From what little I have read, it would seem that the Buddha would have credited more merit to helping one poor man than to building an edifice. The begging of the monks has become an institution rather than an act of piety from which one might gain a

deeper insight into the five ways – or however many there are. I see no difference between the Shwe Dagon gold-leaf covered pagoda in Yangon and the massive cathedrals of the Vatican or South America or France or wherever, or from the mosques of Saudi Arabia or Iraq. One economist said that these things were necessary instruments of capital generation and provided employment. Similar arguments, I am sure, can be found for the manufacture of fission bombs and royal palaces. However, back to the doctor. He said that there was little he could do regarding my ear infection which was an honest assessment when compared to a series of so-called specialists I later consulted in West Australia.

Bill Buchanan, formerly CTA of UNIDO and Habitat projects. Consultant for UNIDO and UNDP and Habitat in Afghanistan; Iraq, Yemen Myanmar and DPR Korea which included project evaluations and finalising 2 years of the Country Program.

[Editor's note: Bill, thank you again for another fascinating Myanmar article. Your concern and affection for the people of that nation clearly shine through in your writing.]

ABOUT US

The *AAFICS Newsletter* is an informal communications tool designed to keep former UN staff



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