

## From the Commodore

### Vice Admiral Simon Lister CB OBE

This week the combined Honorary Flag Officers and Central Committee, supported by invited Subject Matter Experts, met at Hornet Services Sailing Club to consider the next steps in the Case for Change work.

It is very humbling to see the rich breadth and depth of experience that we have within our Membership and the commitment they have shown in helping to guide our Association through these necessary changes and choices. I am very grateful to them all for their thoughtful, well-constructed arguments and advice.

We considered the outcomes and actions from the 2 February meeting and the 18 February AGM at Whale Island.

A Charitable Incorporated Organisation. Taking as our baseline the concerns that we catalogued in February and the five principles that we established, we have now refined our interpretation of the Charity Commission's various model constructs for a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO). As a priority, we have examined carefully the status of you and I as individual members of the Association: how will the change affect us, how can we influence the activities of the Association, what safeguards are in place? We are confident that the 'all of one company' ethos and the outputs of the Association should be unaffected and potentially enhanced by the new RNSA model.

A Board of Trustees. We are also clear that the proposed changes will 'professionalise' the way in which the Association is run. In particular, we will achieve this through the appointment of a Board of Trustees, who will bring relevant expertise in the fields of business law, charities, sponsorship, finance and maritime affairs. These are areas where, with the best will in the world, serving Naval personnel are unlikely to have much experience. So we decided that whatever the outcome of this change process, the appointment of a Board of Trustees is long overdue. As a result, you will see an advertisement appearing shortly inviting 'expressions of interest' from amongst our own Membership, and potentially beyond, for individuals to be considered through a selection process to join that Board.

Application to the Charity Commission. The Committee agreed that we have reached a stage where any further work is unlikely to bear much fruit until we know how the Charity Commission will view us. The Committee therefore voted unanimously to support an application to the Commission for charitable status. As I hope was clear from my last letter, and as we made clear at the AGM, this does NOT mean that we are irrevocably set on that path. Far from it. Once we have passed our draft constitution and plan under the noses of our specialist legal team, this application process is the means by which we can establish on what terms our Association might become a CIO. There are a number of grey areas and no amount of high-priced lawyers will give us a definitive answer on what might be 'in' and what might be 'out'. The only way to do that is to make an application, enter a formal dialogue with the Charity Commission and see what emerges.

Decision Making On Completion. Only then will we decide what happens next. The dialogue with the Commission could take anything from three weeks to three months or more. It may be utterly straightforward (as it was for our colleagues in the RN Football Association) or it might not. Once we have reached a clear decision point, I will bring the Flag Officers and Central Committee back together to consider our position. If we think that the way ahead is clear, we will invite you to vote on it. If we don't, we will return to consider the next best alternative way forward.

Transition Leadership. You may be aware that our Chairman, Richard Farrington, who has carried the burden of this work and the extensive consultation to reach this stage, will shortly depart these shores for a blue water cruise of indeterminate duration. My sincere thanks go to him, and we wish him fair winds and following seas. Phil Warwick and I, supported by Mike Shrives and Heather Tarr, will continue his good work, supported by a small steering group and eventually, a transition team leader selected for the purpose. In the meantime, please address any specific concerns you may have to Mike and Heather – as ever, I will ensure these are addressed as fully as possible.

Yours sincerely

Simon Lister  
Commodore