

The Reasons for my Standing as a Trustee for the Medical Assurance Society

As a long-standing member of MAS I have become concerned that an organisation founded as a 'Mutual' or 'Friendly Society' has become excessively commercially orientated and less responsive to its members concerns.

I was surprised when MAS's Kiwisaver scheme, to which I belonged, changed from being an 'Open' to a 'Closed' scheme without there being any real opportunity for members to either know of the change, or comment on it. At that time I made my concerns known to the CEO and Board and suggested that, as MAS issues several publications for members, that when significant changes were being considered that members be informed and given opportunity to comment.

This year I made complaints addressed to the Board about the manner in which large insurance premium increases had been instituted and made specific suggestions about how MAS might look at the way it informed members of changes. My document and its specific points was not responded to by the Board, neither was a second request, although I made it clear that I was making my complaint about the way MAS dealt with members rather than my specific case.

Having made numerous enquiries as to the fate of my document, I was told it had been transmitted to the Board, which I was later told was untrue. Only after persistent efforts was I told that the Board would be considering my general concerns about MAS's mechanisms for dealing with member's concerns. I requested that my points be addressed and answered by the Board in writing, but over a period of two months have only been made the offer of meeting with individual Board members.

As my contacts increasingly lead me to believe that all was not well in the MAS Board or Management, and being a man of principle, I decided to stand for the Board as a Trustee and was surprised to find that there had been no notice issued to members stating that Trustees were due for retirement and that Members were therefore entitled to nominate. My nomination had to be done in a hurry as I now find that although no announcement of election had been made, the closing date was only a short while away and that the election would take place at the AGM (also not announced until now) shortly.

I find this apparent failure to notify MAS members of Trustees retirement (and therefore the possibility of nominating candidates) and of the AGM, both with appropriate notice, undemocratic and so have pushed ahead with my candidature. An interpretation of the situation is that the Trustees and therefore Board, have become a self-perpetuating group, as there appear to have been no opportunities for Members to nominate or vote for candidates for some time. I hope this interpretation is wrong, and that the situation has arisen by happenstance, but feel I have a duty to other members to bring the situation to the notice of members. Due to the way in which the 'election' takes place and the shortness of preparation time, it is unlikely I will be elected, and if I were elected would not accept any remuneration for my Trusteeship, as I stand on a point of principle.

I make no accusations regarding the conduct of the Board or Management but feel that an unfortunate combination of circumstances have produced a situation that MAS Member's need to be aware of and to rectify it.

In sadness

Stephen Wealthall MD